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NOTHING BUT THE EARTH

by

PAUL MORAND

Translated by

LEWIS GALANTIÈRE

ILLUSTRATED WITH ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD

ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY

NEW YORK · MCMXXVII

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Issued in Paris as "Rieu que la Terre"

Published, October, 1927

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M66
1927

NOTHING BUT THE EARTH

THE PLIMPTON PRESS · NORWOOD · MASS.
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

Nothing but the Earth	3
Atlantic-Pacific	9
Farewell to the West	15
Pacific Ocean	19
Yokohama	22
Nikko	28
Night at Shu-Jenzi	30
Kyoto	33
Nara	36
Osaka	38
Inner Sea	39
Above Pekin	41
A Yamen	47
Temple of Heaven	51
Pekin-Purow Limited	53
Shanghai	54
The Longest Bar in the World	60
Hong-Kong	64
Macao	69
Manila	74
Tropical Fish	78
Borneo	83
Singapore: Capital of the Animal Kingdom	85
The Swallow-nest Islands	91
Siam	95
Arrival at Bangkok	97
Bangkok	103
The Chinese Quarter	107
The Temples	115

Siamese Festivals 132
White Elephants 136
Games 140
Some Customs of the Country 142
Siamese Art 147
In the Wings of the Siamese Theatre . . . 150
At the Opera 155
An Evening of Siamese Dances 158
Ayuthia 163
Farewell to Bangkok 165
Fever in Cambodia 167
Equatorial Forest 170
Bokor Palace Hotel 178
Off Sumatra 181
Ceylon 184
Indian Ocean 188
Sokotra 190
Aden 191
Djibouti 193
Indian Mail 195
Asiatic Hotels 202
Suez 206
Port Said 208
Crete 212
Straits of Messina 213
First Lighthouse of France 215

NOTHING BUT THE EARTH

"At the Mazarin Library I see two things that make me think continually of a *momento mori:* that multitude of dead books no longer read, the true cemetery that awaits us all, and that enormous terrestrial globe on which Europe and France seem so puny beside the vast spaces of Africa and Asia, and the immensely vaster surface of water that covers almost a full hemisphere."

Ste. Beuve: *Notes et penseés*

Nothing but the Earth

A cyclist, pedaling along the latitudes, head lowered against the onrushing winds at the great corners of the earth, — Aden, Manila, Cape Horn, Dakar. Coasting down the long smooth slope of the longitudes. Stopping short at the risk of toppling, poised out of perpendicular, like a boot-maker's swaying sign, like a fountain-pen. The track is convex, so that if you want to circle the globe several times in an hour, you have to go to the pole and hug the inside rail. But if you prefer lazy touring and the illusion of space, your path is along the equator. There the globe, whose head and feet are of ice, hides its burning loins under a tufted grassy skirt. Its belly bakes in the sun.

When he has toyed with the center of the earth, has untied its equatorial sash, the north-bound traveler comes back to Europe. What would he not give for an earth that was infinitely flat! Or to leave Cherbourg, and never reach Marseilles? You read of the amazement of the early navigators: how much more miraculous to hoist sail never to return, or at least not to return ignobly, to one's

starting point! If but the earth were really vast, as children, travelers, and planispheres believe it to be. If only there were no "ends of the earth." And if to the yellow, black, and white splotches that mark the races, we might add a violet race, a blue, a pink, a green race.

Our fathers were sedentary. Our sons shall be even more so, for they will have only the earth on which to move. We are still able to find some pleasure in measuring the globe, — but they? Where we enjoy a swing around the globe, they will see nothing but "this incomprehensible gibberish about traveling." The circling of the cage will be done in a twinkling. A Victor Hugo would write in 1930: "The child will plead, 'Mother, may I run over to India?' And the mother will reply, 'Yes, if you will take this sandwich with you.'"

We are headed towards the tour of the world on eighty francs. All that we hear about man's misery will not really come to pass until this tariff is fixed. To all the existing reasons why life is impossible will be added the cruelty of a cramped existence on a ball whose watery area (which might have been raised into the sky or buried underground) covers, unfortunately, three quarters of its surface. Man will succumb to the finite, die locked up in a compartment, sealed up in the single-class car-

riage of this little sphere lost in space. For the earth is astonishingly small; it is only the lack of high-speed ships that hides this fact from us. One day soon it will strike us that the steamship companies have been deceiving us. And then the negroes and the Chinese will turn up to claim our rich lands. There will be a battle of races over the most salubrious climates as there was a battle of classes for the possession of wealth. Unless man invents, meanwhile, scientific plagues and artificial floods, he may look forward to a number of cosmic wars and metaphysical suicides. His ultimate refuge will be a Trappist monastery, — God's foreign legion, — where he will be able to spend his time seeking in height an infinity denied by the breadth at his disposal. Or, by way of alternative, he might set out to conquer other planets: The *Mayflower* hopping off at dawn for Saturn, with a cargo of the remnants of the white race? The Pasteur Institute and the Rockefeller Foundations, by preventing the death of people whom Providence, in its wisdom, had condemned in useful numbers, will have done more injury to our race than all the engines of war. Michelet says that if various devastations had not been provided by nature for the extermination of the herring family, these fish, with their inundations of spermatozoa, would fill up, or dry

up, the seven seas. But after all, what of it, since everything destined to happen must be brought about. The frightful beauty of our age is that in it races have mingled without understanding one another or taking the time to know and be able to bear one another. We have learned to build locomotives whose speed outruns ideas. The United States of Europe. There was a brilliant notion. Why could not the politicians have fostered it? The problem remains of — to use their language — carrying the thing out. Who can speak the truth? Who, except the technicians of exile, has any inkling that it will take hundreds of years, education, saints, and martyrs to persuade ordinary people to live a common life, if they do not speak the same language? My testimony is founded upon fifteen years of life abroad. Take an example close by: France and England. These two nations, among the greatest on earth, are separated by forty-five minutes of sea. Yet, despite more than ten centuries of intercourse, they are as far apart as Persia and the Antilles. They have shed blood in the same cause; yet, if we set aside the official declarations of love, they live in mutual ignorance and contempt. It is only hypocrisy that prevents us from calling foreigners "swine" and "unclean" as the Orientals do. So long as nations continued

in ignorance of one another, international conversations were held in Latin or French between the aristocrats of the mind, and everything was simple. To-day, we have no Franklin, no Voltaire, no Erasmus; we have town councillors paying and returning calls. And still we are astonished to see hatred grow in direct proportion to custom statistics and the number of passports visaed! Every virtue is an obstacle. No one objects to a foreigner's defects; even more than individuals, nations are loved for their defects only. Who would have thought of turning towards the Orient while it possessed a wisdom and a secret of life which it has now lost? Why should we become interested in it only at the moment when it is sinking into the quicksand of fanatic nationalism, succumbing to the gluttony of gold and the new needs created by the fertile absurdity of Western trade? The France that foreigners appreciate is the France of Louis XV and of the Second Empire; it is not the France of Louis XIV, or of Verdun. And since it is not mutual riches but mutual poverties that are exchanged, might not the stupidity of reciprocal ignorance be preferable to the hatred of reciprocal familiarity?

Already, after fifty years of brief scientific triumph, the effects of a strong polytechnical

culture are making themselves felt. The white man has dug into mountains, unsoldered continents, straightened coast-lines and rivers, domesticated the forces of nature and changed the face of the universe. Everywhere he has been punished for these acts; we no longer laugh at the old Chinese who knew that the rail and the boiler disturbed and irritated the demons. The earth has ceased to be a garishly colored flag; we are in the dirty age of the half-breed.

What a way we have come since the Pythagoreans, whose theory, that world meant order and was the antonym of chaos, had a moment of general acceptance! It was on the 20th September 1766, which is to say to-day, that Voltaire, our contemporary, wrote: "You may take it for granted that the world is a sinking ship and the motto of men is *Every man for himself*." [1]

[1] *Sauve qui peut.*

Atlantic—Pacific

Across America like a bullet from New York to Vancouver, scarcely entering the country; a surgeon's seton, so to say. Behind the Downtown skyscrapers, whose magical fifty storeys rise like the towers of the Chaldean astrologers, — to be closer to the star of the dollar, — stands the Grand Central Station, opening the roads to the West.

Up the Hudson, the cool, swiftly-flowing river, towards the palm formed by the Great Lakes. Niagara Falls: when our missionaries from Saint Sulpice saw it, they fell on their knees and intoned the *Magnificat*. To-day, a negro dining-car waiter says briefly: "Niagara Falls, boss." To-morrow being the Fourth of July, the Falls will be illuminated by electric lights in *crème-de-menthe* green, laundry-tub blue, and Picasso pink.

Chicago. On a sky quivering with heat, factory-chimneys lazily practise sky-writing. The sandy beaches of Lake Michigan, which comes into the city, are strewn with bathers. Even when un-

clothed, these handsome bodies are the bodies of millionaires. And now the prairies, the black and green wheatlands. The loaded tips undulate as in *Samson and Delilah*. Two Hungaries and four Rumanias laid end to end. Little anonymous railway stations celebrated in cycles of movie history. Memories of epics in celluloid stir in us as we look at them with the same emotion we bring to the places at Argos chanted by Aeschylus: corrals, grain elevators, Fairbanks in cowboy dress, the old-fashioned, high-wheeled buggy come to fetch Grace Miles, Fatty in his shrunken chequered vest, the druggist standing over his nickeled levers in command of a variety of colored and flavored ice creams, Charlie Chaplin drinking but not paying, the sheriff coming to pick him up by the scruff of the neck and carry him off in one of those old Fords which are the only ruins on this new continent.

After three days of prairie the earth begins to swell. An oil-burner takes over the work of the coal-burning locomotive. The Rockies. Farewell to the crushing and humid Atlantic summer. The travelers are no longer in their shirt-sleeves. Steam on the window panes. A country first of sloping moors, then red rocks. Lakes of pale, icy water. Pine trees hardened by the cold. Snow overhead. Canada.

One hears of two Canadas, the first English, the second French. Here seems to be a third, one greater and more modern, — American Canada. It stretches to the Pacific. Humped buffaloes, mountain sheep with ammonite horns, and plush bears who stand at the gateways of this land like mascots at the tips of motor cars. This new fauna, sheltered from crime in the great national preserves, gazes as we pass. Banff: winter sports, international hotels built of wood, all the Switzerlands.

Here and there are the "colored posts" that Rimbaud would have loved, old Indian totem-poles with painted monsters, their eyes joined, soldered to the nose. You see them in all Pacific art, on the war shields of the Solomon Islands as well as on the prows of the Siberian barks (*vide* British Museum and Museum of Stockholm). We cross the highest crests: ringing in the ears, the quinine of altitude. Then the climate grows more temperate, and through the trees that hold up the sky like the legs of a console table, we rush down upon the Pacific. Each hour marks a victory over the flowers or more thin-blooded essences. Already the Chinese appear, the same magical truck-gardeners here as on the banks of the Yellow River. We

reel between the snow and the flowers. One smile flashed at nature, and out of their great sleeves pour the blossoms. Columbia River, Frazer River, powdered with the gold of placers and of sunset. Pools of whisky where the Yankee lions come down to quench their thirst. Unhappy the man who risks himself on the Seattle road of a Sunday night. British Columbia. Vancouver, its face to the Far East.

Farewell to the West

The lift takes me up to the sixteenth storey of the hotel in Vancouver. I step out on the roof. There is a pergola, with a beach of soot, and, in the foreground, a bed of those silly little flowers that are quicker than any words to reach the English heart. In the blue amphitheatre of the Rockies they perform but one play, which is the town. There is a single cut in the hemicycle, the twisted bottle-neck entry of the Pacific. Having made its way in, the water flows in a curve which threatens to make of the town an island.

This is a town of provincial England in which the King's representative lives in a Parthenon. Outside its windows stands a white mast from which the colors fly every Sunday after divine service. Revolving sprays that look like water fans keep the lawn green. The begonia bushes are trimmed in the form of medals of honor. The English do not wear decorations, but the lawns are hung with the Order of Merit, the Star of India, the Victoria Cross, — the Governor's dreams. In the streets, cut by deep black asphalt, are Ameri-

can motor cars. Their owners have driven with tongues hanging from the State of Washington. There are little shops for the sale of *Enos Fruit Salt*, sweet peas, cowboy saddles of pyrograved leather, with straps that hang like plumb-lines because of the weight of the solid copper stirrups. Houses, removed to the suburbs, pass on camions. In British Columbia people sometimes change the location of their home but never the home. Every man carries his shell with him. To put in pipe-lines in the new sub-divisions they dynamite the roots of trees. Lying one against the other, the trunks burn out with a smell of incense while the street is being finished. The Gothic tower of an Anglican church is a reminder of Magdalen and Oxford, even against the green-gold background of the Pacific. Stormy barricades pile up against the sunset. Above, the crest of the mountains traces a perfectly broken line which the clouds take up with emphasis in a major key.

This is the Breton cape, the Finistère of the West. Ten days behind is Europe; ten days ahead, facing the setting sun, is Japan the oblique. We stand at the half-way point, where the end of the white man's earth meets the last word of the Far East. Which way is one to lean among these trees as rigid as the impartial beam of the scales?

Among these trees whose chest measurement is such that certain trunks, hollowed out by lightning, are used as garages? When you come into Asia through Russia, the transition is imperceptible. After you leave Germany and the shelter of the great western slope of Pomeranian granite, you are still in Europe, — at least, so says your atlas; but actually, without perceiving it, you are already in Asia and up to your ears in Slavic sands. The frontier between Europe and Asia might be put at many other points than the Ural Mountains; but what separates Asia from America is necessarily here. On the shores of the Pacific the transition is sudden, the abyss is open. This is why Europe is still struggling with problems of nationality while America has reached the problem of the races. In the United States the war of 1914 is commonly spoken of as "a war of Secession between whites," that is to say, a fratricidal war in the face of a common danger — the colored peoples. What would the Balkan peoples understand of this?

With this last island of Victoria, with Seattle, we leave an optimistic America, stocked as was our Europe in its best days, sailing easily over its territory, full of selfishness outside and of generosity inside, Puritan at heart, Slavic in its senses, Greek in its muscles, a land that I admire for its

ostrich-like stomach that absorbs everything and restores nothing, an America still uncreative, fabricating, but at least perfectly happy. For how long? If America should refuse to swallow such insults as England has swallowed at Angora and at Canton, — insults which will threaten her in her turn, — will America then take up arms in the name of us all, and play the last trick of the white aristocracy now retreating before the advance of the yellow and the black? Is the day coming when we shall see these green banks ravaged by flotilla fire, and are those canyons of the Rockies through which I passed to be the defiles of a new Peloponnesus?

Pacific Ocean

In the bright sunlight the ship is square and white, a veritable African *douar*, bristling, with the broken lines of its windlasses, like a cactus plant. Our only distraction at the dinner table is the daily news sheet printed on board. Since the wireless messages grow more and more costly, they come more rarely to poise like wearied birds at the tips of our masts. Great round waves follow one another with a slow hard beat to indicate that land is still near. Then, at the bottom of elastic valleys, the ship begins to rise and fall. The weather grows threatening.

A few days before I left Paris, Claudel spoke to me of *The Man Who Laughs*, guiding me on an unforgettable excursion, feature by feature, over Hugo's face, explaining to me in his sturdy, masticated, exploded words how completely Hugo was fused with the beyond. I took a copy of the book with me, and now that I look at the unpronounceable names of his characters, — Gwymplaine, Barkiphedro, Hardtquanonne, — names that seem to be dictated by tipping tables, I wonder why Hugo is never mentioned among the ancestors of the Surrealist writers.

The storm is rising, and like another, an internal storm, comes the ramming sound of the swimming-pool against the sides of the ship. And I have the feeling that a third storm, that with which Hugo's novel opens, will grow more animated, and that in the end all three storms will seek to come together.

At nine o'clock I was seized with fear. I threw volume one, unread, out of the port-hole. At midnight the sea grew calm and I fell asleep.

Twelve days of white fog, lilac-tinted at evening, but ever impenetrable. There are no stars to guide the navigation officer in this mid-summer December sky. A few yards of sea along the sides of the ship. One horizontal abyss added to another. Never another ship met. For six days the shrieking siren has pierced these pale vapors that guard the approach to Asia and seem to issue forth from the mouth of dragons. On the starboard side are the frozen currents of the pole; on the port side is the last warm steam of the tropics.

Only once, there where Alaska is so fragilely soldered to the Aleutian Islands, did we see the great waters of the whales. Nothing else that was vertical. Magnetic lands where Cook sought passage, sending his boat to glide among the islands like the hand of an untried surgeon among delicate

bones. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century an austral continent was sought in the South Pacific while in the north men looked for an open sea between Europe and China. Neither existed. In the south they found the ocean; in the north the solder of Asia and America. Thus, even when they set out in error, men make great discoveries.

Evil omens. Entry into a forbidden world. A moonlit noon pierced by the flight of wild ducks in arrowhead formation. The magical advance of our long ship, like a sonorous, three-holed flute, moving towards another planet, laden with Chinese coffins going home to Shanghai. Two navigations, the one within the other: ours across the immense emptiness between America and Asia, a non-stop flight, no ports at which to put in, no alleviations, a crossing scarcely less eternal than theirs in the coffins.

About my berth I feel the powerful pressure of the water against the sides of the ship. I feel the struggle of the steel plates against the water. Their effort is transmitted to the interior of the ship, to the Renaissance or Louis XV woodwork that creaks and groans in the night. Beneath me are the Kurilian depths. No fear of running aground to-night; the sea is five miles deep at this point.

Yokohama

Astrologers pluck stars at the bottom of wells, where they are most fresh. It was in this Japan Sea that we met new constellations and fish with an apocryphal enamel. Having stripped the petals of the propeller time and time again during these twelve days ("he loves me, he loves me not") — passionately — we arrived one evening at Yokohama.

I shall not forget the traces of torture, the chasms in the streets, the crestless houses, of this disrupted city. It is only a few months since I saw it, and yet I have to summon all the prestidigitation of memory to reconstruct this first view of Asia into a magical illusion, which is already false. If one could only know at what point memory and reality meet, one might post oneself there, collate the two texts, prevent this absurd coupling. But the error of time, which spins exquisite years out of days of boredom, hours of annoyance, and minutes of anguish, is very like the error of space. Distance lends enchantment, or, as the Hindus

say, "the farther away the singer, the more beautiful the song."

Cubes of concrete line the quays as once more we swing alongside. Like children with their building blocks, we have begun our city by its frame. Why did I have to stop? Now I begin to miss the plastic, ever-changing and indestructible sea.

As far back as I can remember, there is present in me a desire to be elsewhere, an implacable desire, tenacious as a wound; and ever under my eyes lies the wide open atlas. Even to-day, the tears on my face are those shed by others. I am like *Felix the Cat* of the Movies, a black outline against the white background of oblivion, with a sheaf of question marks quivering above my head. My armorial should display a Medusa with this device of Michelet's: "mobile, she dreams of rest; inert, she dreams of movement."

"You will change," says the *Imitation of Christ*, "and it will not profit you." Patently; it is as much as to say that one is equally badly off everywhere. But what our age has discovered is that during the moment of change, when one transforms oneself into movement, one is better off. It is impossible to go too far in one's search for the desire to be at home. Even now, at the moment of debarkation, I see that I do not like travel,

that I love only movement. This is the one truth, the one beauty. I shall never be ashamed of my life so long as it continues to possess mobility. My one fixed point is the idea of change. My imperfect art is but a calculation of the distance between two changing points. Frenchmen must be taught to accept change joyously; they always submit to it with reluctance and delay. Are they then so happy that commotion means to them only the worst that Fate has in store?

Buddha says that life at home is but narrow subjection, a state of impurity; liberty resides in the abandonment of home.

Here, after the moving waters, is the quay, hard as frozen ground. The fissures that so lately swallowed up motor cars, the exposed pipe lines, have scarcely been filled and covered. Cross-sections of palaces waiting to be repaired show staircases that look like snails running into the sky; a safe has been left standing in the middle of a steppe that was recently a bank; there are towers with their brains blown out. The cubes of concrete lie where they were projected into the water. The up-rooted wharf and the iron framework of its reinforced concrete bristle like a towsled head of hair. Houses are neatly laid out in little pieces

with that minute care which the Japanese display in misfortune. Here as elsewhere, only what seemed most perishable was able to resist the quake: a numb drunkenness, an absurd oscillation, saved the factory chimneys. And the Imperial Hotel of Tokio, squat, unshakable in the midst of a town which seems as if blown up by dynamite, still stands among the beams twisted like Japanese pines, — this hotel built by an architect who was thought mad because he had taken as models Aztec momuments and the style of volcanic regions. Standing in front of the proud houses, shot down at close range, is a world of huts; together, they look like a Kremlin-Mattewan on a battle-scarred Champs Élysées.

Behind lies luxuriant Japan, green and cultivated as a workman's balcony. Its trees, the only trees between the fallow ground of the Pacific and a China gelded of its woods, are written against the sky; its dwarfed forests are carefully treated with curling-irons by those professors of bouquet-fashioning who call from door to door and know the symbolology of flowers and the art of making branches rhyme. Behind are the peasants, clothed in thatch like their roofs, bending under the rain over the rice paddies between the upper and the lower waters. To-morrow the European eye will

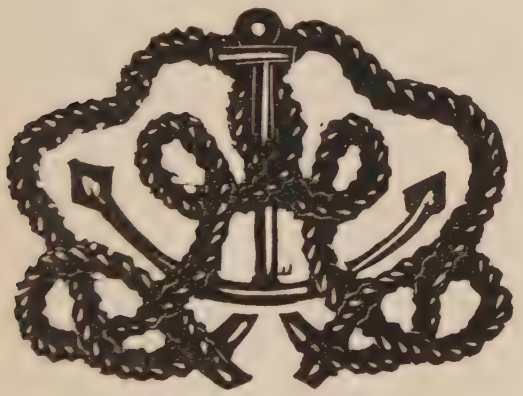
no longer see one familiar object; it will be assailed by the novelty of each face, surprised by each line and color of an unknown country.

But this evening we eat a catastrophe dinner at the Tent Hotel of Yokohama, which rose in ten seconds to replace the demolished international hotels that buried their French cooks at the hour of noon, flattening them out like dough; buried also their German porters, who seemed invincible and were pricked with questions like the Hindenburg monument with nails, their Italian chief-clerks whom, with their rubbery spines, one would have thought unbreakable. The first thing I learned about Asia was that it was not immobile.

A Y. M. C. A. hut roofed over with that handsome corrugated iron that is striped like the soul of cannon; beds covered with rigid mosquito netting and looking like pantry cupboards; a group of Europeans gathered like a single family in distress, about one stewed chicken. It is Ypres without the wailing in the skies. . . . But some Frenchmen have learned that I am here. They appear with the second course and lead me forth into the midst of these tragic forums, out into the night strewn with inexplicable gibbets as soft as caramels, over bridges that can ill bear the weight of weariness, and on to the French Club. There, in the midst

of impermanence, I find a hearth already rebuilt, French cooking and French wines, and I finish my dinner with Brie cheese and Charentes butter, brought through the Red Sea and the typhoons in the cold storage rooms of the Messageries ships.

And, like a constellation, the brandy of France, with its three stars aglow.



Nikko.

I flew through the Japanese bow like an arrow, but an arrow that will ever remember all the landscapes over which it passed. Nikko, where the sovereign trees, ever so slightly imprisoned by their roots, cross branches in an extinguished fireplace. In one thrust of scarlet arch, the famous red lacquer bridge strides over the torrent. Abrupt folds in the mountains, metallic fractures, volcanic formations, a country like Calabria. The summer rain that falls is hot water, already tropical. High in the air is a steaming haze, but the peaks are higher, holding themselves stiff-necked in the favorite poses of the landscape painters of kakemonos. Cryptomerias of the time of Charlemagne, their greenery beginning to rust; conifers twisted in the semblance of the local alphabet, flooded simultaneously by sunshine and by rain, paralleling the vertiginous drop of the mountain-side. The mountain rests solidly upon its foundations of Cyclopean lozenges of granite. There the Temples stand in the midst of a landslide, like ingots forgotten in a puddle of ashes. They are veneered

with an orange-red lacquer, propped up on plinths of a darker varnish, and reinforced at the corners with polished brass. Shall I repeat, with other observers, that Japanese art is all nuance, impressionism, a series of little boxes fitting into one another, a thin excellence in the minor arts? Under the great horned roofs in the chiaroscuro stand altars whose shadows lie black on the pale gold screens. Everything here is barbaric and powerful; only the winding smoke of the incense provides a note of grace. Long knots of hierarchic silk hide from the eyes of visitors the secret of the mountain.

Night at Shu-Jenzi

I let myself be hoisted over the torrential stream by two coolies whose backs bulge with muscle under my feet while their strong, twisted legs come up out of the mud like trees exhuming their roots. Compared with these men, American pugilists and Basque pelota players are anaemic weaklings. We meet yellow splotches on the way: they are pilgrims wrapped in oilcloth. Over their heads float the mica rose-windows of black-lettered umbrellas. First comes an odor of tepid water and sacred forest, then, as we rise, a luxurious coolness and the roar of the torrent, covering even the sound of the clogs. On our way to the great summer reservoir, the Lake of Shu-Jenzi. We pass flights of pheasants painted from the life in front of Taoist rest-houses adorned by paper hung from threads (for the amusement of what cats?). Farther on, a famous waterfall takes the overflow of the lake and sends it crashing into a powdery spray three hundred feet below. Helpless at the sight of these romantic beauties, lovers of suicide, defeated candidates, disappointed parents, opposition politicians, lovers tied by the sash

to the beloved (she with her back in space) throw themselves daily into the abyss and are withdrawn once a week. This morning seventeen were hauled out.

The night spent in the cool shade of this place was an armistice in the battle with summer. A delightful bath, seated in the tepid and slippery wood of the tub, smoother than a man's nail. In the sweating-room hung the agreeable aroma of the maple logs burning under the cauldrons, and in the solitary light of the embers shone these alembics, joined by great pipes wound round with cloths — like the intestines of a harakiri interrupted by good news and hastily replaced — to the tub in which I lay soaking, as if with my own juice I might fabricate some sort of writing liquid, some extract of man.

Then slumber in the cold air, the air drawn deep into the lungs with every breath as I lie abed under a real blanket in a room with a real fire-place, in a Japanese house, a masterpiece of the joiner's art, with beams, latches, and everything else made of the same living material. I lie thinking of Marie Laurencin who said to me one day that she could not touch iron and had to have only things of wood about her. Wood is the most magnificent flesh of Japan.

In the morning the countryside is soundless. The rain has stopped. The background has vanished. The lake appears. Against the grey silk of the sky, against the gold-leaf of the sun, ducks and herons fly in the style of the classic period. Bare feet and muffled heels on the elastic matting, this matting of the color and odor of honey, would never have wakened me. But at six o'clock the shutters are taken down, so that it seems to me I have been forgotten and have fallen asleep in a shop. The walls, the screens, slide back. Across the paper panels runs an autumnal maple with dried leaves glued among the painted ones. The whole house is dismounted for the day. The beds are rolled up into a ball and a trap opens suddenly in a wall and swallows them as if they were tongues.

Kyoto

From the hotel perched high in the sky, I hover like a traveling crane over these stern, noble, imperial palaces, lethargic amid their stagnant ditches, their unruffled waters filled with stiffening carp. As I move down-hill the walls grow gradually higher in abrupt panels broken by soldered corners and sulphur-wood doorways, topped by bristling roofs, with, covering them like a blotched, feverish skin, a layer of fortifications: blocks of stone piled without mortar among grasses and tall pines shaken in the wind amidst their double needles like a woman beaten in a shower of her hairpins. Kyoto, the rigid setting of the tenth century romances of chivalry, is renowned as the homeland of women who write, nobles who paint, and emperors who compose poetry. There was the emperor whose longest poem was:

"*Who dams the torrent? Leaves, the red leaves of the maple tree;*"

and that other, so Whitmanesque, of the Hei-an period:

"Pines and cranes, comrades for a thousand and a thousand years!"

Evenings in the empyrean of the Miyako Hotel, whose terrace overlooks a mingling of hills, temples, and gardens melting into one another under the stars that gleam and clash towards the sea, as far as the Dog-Plain which saw the election of the first Emperor. In the ash of the night all the houses give off the same glow, softened by the translucence of the oiled paper, the glow of banked fires in which the word *hearth* finally acquires a meaning.

Of a sudden I find myself packed and potted in a crowded hall, the scene of championship fencing and two-handled sabre matches. One contestant is dressed in white, the other in black. More than any other people, the Japanese betray their caste in their faces and their bodies. (In France there are dukes who look like butchers and ragmen with the faces of Dauphins.) Tall, long-limbed young men, thoroughbreds, dressed in hieratic robes and corseted in shining black armour, about to clash with the shock of armoured ships, to ply their swords like scarabs. Magnificent features seen through the wire masks. One of them, with his coarse, short hair and his stern glance, reminds me

of Henry de Montherlant. Padded gloves of white skin raise the wooden sabres. Religious genuflection, both knees slowly bent. Living sculpture. Then the sabre rises over and behind the head, and the fencers bound in the air with a wild, terrifying, tigerlike roar. The blades clash and the gracefully placed toes of the bare feet shift as the cleft in the armour is sought and the blows rain flatly upon the head and land at either side of the neck. It is a miracle that these heads do not fly off. Then at the judge's cry the ardor ends, the tumult coagulates. Once more the contestants kneel, knee-caps facing; their arms grow numb; their heavy masked heads nuzzle one another awkwardly, like those of fish in water.

Nara

Time is a well. I plunge down to the sixth and seventh centuries, to the heart of old Japan, of these vertebrated islands stretched between China and the sea from Kamchatka to Formosa. Nara: the original capital in the golden age of poetry that fashioned those Japanese who are so remote from modernity, so bewildered by the grandeur of Western inventions and the meanness of the inventors, those proud and shy Japanese who seem like worried animals when I ask them what they are thinking about.

Primitive temples bedaubed with minium in which the white of lime, the earthen ochre, and the red of shells alternate as on the shields of the Easter Islanders and bring to mind the Malays, the ancestors of primitive Japan, dispersed between Madagascar and South America. A Japanese is a Polynesian endowed with genius. In these squat, still living beams we see the wooden temples of archaic Greece which later ages of academic pride and less faith transposed into marble.

The artisans of Nara's unique statuary may have been Chinese, Coreans, or Hindus, but the material

was Japanese: tender and imperishable wood, lacquers brought from the southern forests where, in the sadness of the dreadful sun, the trees weep tears of resin, exude gum in an attempt to preserve themselves by insulation against the active death of the tropics. Lands arid and veneered, masks of sacred dances, and later the Nô plays, their strangeness still confined within the bounds of reality; statues of blind priests and of women whose Asiatic bodies are covered (by what rainbow brought, by what thousand-league stride?) with Athenian draperies of the Alexandrian age.

The hinds of the park at Nara come up to nibble round cakes and stamped wafers, hosts eaten before the effigy of a god. These six or eight muzzles, these moist snouts, nuzzle against you, nestle into your hands; they breathe into your mouth, and the boldest of these hinds puts her hooves on your shoulders the better to kiss you, like her sisters, the hinds in the books of the pre-Raphaelites.

Osaka

The next day, Osaka, whence the first Ainos were forced to flee before the Malay pirates. Now, two thousand years later, it has become an industrial inferno beside which Chicago and Detroit seem to me flowered meadows. Incredible machinery stands out against a background of sheets of copper with a hint of the sea in it: elevators, scales, machines for weaving the clouds, and square or triangular chimneys in continuous erection; an artillery of industry annihilating the sun and multiplying the furnace of summer tenfold. Already the railway runs off in the direction of Kobe, advising me against Osaka, the city of a thousand blast furnaces whose russet columns of smoke add, nevertheless, a fresh grace to the delicate tones of the past as seen in the school of Kanaoka.

Inner Sea

Once more at sea, among sampans whose sails are stretched over a network of nerves: on the canvas side, rolls of padding; on the inside, thin bamboo ribs. A landscape jammed with islands. Reminiscences of Finland and Dalmatia. Proudly, they point out to me those last hairy pines of the Inner Sea that one reads of in all the novels whose heroes are naval officers. The Swiss and the Japanese are the only foreigners satisfied with their little country. The setting sun is the most beautiful adventure of the day. Everybody on board runs to see it, as if it were the last on earth (the ship is tipping). Other scenes cut out of my memory, — the Trocadero, Royan, Rouen, — are silhouetted against this slopeless sea, this water as glossy as mica. On the starboard side lies a crust of mauve water, pink on the surface and green underneath, and over it as far as the eye can see the smoke of our two stacks floats like a canopy. Up from the stoke-holes, dressed in overalls, the stokers come to get a breath of air: pock-marked Chinese, sure-footed Japanese, flat-

faced negroes, and Annamite boys, pale under their beautiful hair, useless, well-groomed, and idle, kept on for the pleasures of the forecastle.

There is a Franciscan missionary on his way from the southern islands of Japan to Jerusalem. A divine brute. He travels like a parcel, like a sacred civil servant going from one post to another. It is twelve years since he has left his savages, and words fail him.

I said to him: "You must have found it difficult to convert Buddhists."

He answered: "If only they had been Buddhists! But they were pagans, savages. They worshipped the sun and the moon."

So tranquil a night is coming down.

The Franciscan says: "What a beautiful moon!"

Above Pekin

On the roof of the Grand Hotel, in the penumbra, white-clad diners are seated about white tables. Chinese servants in white blouses, like country surgeons, serve them with that silence and diligence, that light, secret ubiquity, that becomes a necessity once one has known it. Overhead is an expanse of black sky in which one's eyes, weary of a day of light and dust, seek repose.

No city is less lighted than Pekin. Below, the Legations are stifled by their gardens. They end at those mediaeval posterns which advance as far as the deserted glacis, the zone of fire. On the left, the Ha-Ta-Men and the great Chinese arteries are discernable on this nocturnal map merely as pale, uncertain threads, forming a sort of milky way without curves. The Tartar City is coloured only by the pig bladders of the inner courtyards, speckled by the woven rushes and the trees, which are so numerous in Pekin that it is hard to say if we are in a decorated city or a decimated forest. Except for the electricity in the Pei-Hai, a pagoda blazing like a dance-hall these three weeks past,

the Forbidden City is present chiefly in its obscure absence. The memory of the day alone lights up the imperial yellow of the roof tiles, their angles like the tents of Jenghiz Khan, whose flaps used to be lifted by the aid of silken cords which, says Marco Polo, joined the sky to the earth. This total obscurity is a picture of the oblivion henceforth ever present here. Emperors and gods have fled. Liberated generals replace them. The night of feudality.

All the Europeans who are not at the sea-shore are collected on this roof, dancing to Chinese airs humanized into Blues by a syncopated orchestra. The servant-strike in the English colony has emptied the bungalows, the banks, and the shops. Brick-red, squeezed into their little white Eton jackets, these English seem like first communicants who have been allowed to stay up later than usual. Their childish air is a surprise in this country where children have the faces of centenarians.

Pekin. This is the middle of the earth. Twenty days backward or forward, across Siberia or across the States, lies our Paris. Let them not come to China who travel far in search of poetry (or more exactly of what the English call "romance," that untranslatable, unpronounceable and perfect word). Here, all is grey under the Mongolian wind.

Everything is precise, hard, and real, despite the uncommon proportions. The number is very great but never infinite. Nothing speaks to the heart. Europe with its antiquated graces, and America with its childish naïveté, have not accustomed us to so much inhumanity. China is a compact and indifferent monolith. It may be stirred by the impetus of universal avalanches, but no inner and spontaneous impulse has ever thrust it forward. "Asia, mother of men:" yes, if you mean the gods of mystical India, the poets of Persia, the thinkers of Russia (that laboratory with broken windows); but who would think of China when the hour comes for enthusiasm, for generous giving of self, for the Asia of to-morrow, about which a part of Europe dreams, ready for the betrothal?

In China as in France, it is only the earth that gives — and jealously — to its sons. Between them and it there still subsist sacred ties, although, as regards their ancestors, the ties are already growing more slack. So long as the Chinese population does not increase excessively, it will always prefer this soil to any other. No military ambition, no political crusade, will stir it to ferment. Before the reservoir may be expected to overflow and send the yellow waters once more pouring from the roof of the world, one must be able to imagine a China

without wars, without epidemics, without cataclysms. At such a time, however, these four hundred million men will become a thousand million and the world will be a yellow world. The proof of this is in the example of Japan and its fantastic growth, — nearly one million births a year, — since the introduction of sanitation and modern science. The question is no longer "Do the Japanese love America or Australia, or don't they?" It is: "Who will be killed by the explosion of over-compressed Japan?"

It is thanks to earthquakes, typhoons, and the floods of the Yang-Tse that our children will be able to continue their truck-gardening around Avignon and Roscoff, — gardening which, as a matter of fact, is very far from producing all that Chinese hands could produce with it. No white laborer, no white shopkeeper, can compete with these yellow men who dine on a broiled watermelon seed. Do our trades unions realize this? If the Pacific, that ditch it takes twelve days to cross, seems to America insufficient protection, what shall Europe say, which nothing separates from Asia, and which is merely a fertile valley at the foot of a mountain?

I remember that other night when, after dinner, we went up to the Bell Tower. You have to throw stones at the door. It opens, but the doorman does not emerge from his opium doze. The Tower is built on a massive foundation pierced by an arch through which you see a dappled sky and the moon. You climb towards the moon by steps so steep that a stairway could be cut into each of them. The greatest bell in the world is surrounded by a terrace from which you see Pekin, asleep under the same moon that serves so many people. Beside it is the Drum Tower with its three roofs pierced through in the centre, and the pot-hook of its tiles. Here and there may be seen the battlements of the old wall, and the rectilinear avenues crowned by their high-perched gates. To the south stands Coal Hill; there too lies the Imperial City, yellow and varnished like a sailor's oilskin. On the right are the Western mountains, hovering like the wing of a kingfisher in the distant azure. A memory of the Euganean hills. The men are wearing white evening clothes or monkey jackets; the women, Manila shawls. The light renders the first more silken, the shawls more frozen. The world is asleep; only the coffin builders are awake, planing smooth their supreme barks. Shall I, before I am launched forth in one of them, see again magical

Mongolia, romantic Manchuria, classic Corea? Shall I, behind the priests, the sewage bearers, the Manchu ladies in blue carts, once more go through Chien-Men towards the muddy suburbs of Pekin which are like a pool that is being drained?

A Yamen

This red strong-box door, horizontally barred by a latch of polished copper that gleams at the end of a passage whose walls are eaten by black lichen, a true slum-quarter alley, well calculated to frighten Europeans who know nothing of Asia; this Chinese cabinet contains a curio: it is the prettiest of *yamen*, the prettiest house in the Tartar City. In order to reach it, you have to shift into low and crush down mountains of offal and heaps of plaster, for here whole walls of clay have dissolved like sugar under the autumn storms and have crumbled to the ground. You are disgusted by the lakes of muds that have been splashed up by passing rickshaws against the walls.

The outer door opens on a blind wall against which the advancing line of demons that follow and precede us will inevitably break their heads. The cleverer visitor follows a zigzag path into a first courtyard. This house is a series of inner courts on which the living quarters open in circles as in ancient houses. I have come for an out-door dinner. Night has not yet fallen. Through the screens,

already reminiscent of colonial bungalows, I can see into a living room shadowed by the overhanging roof. Lacquer gleams like vertical pools of black water. Paintings hang unrolled. Between two windows, on a bit of brickwork that was once a stove, for the house is of ancient construction, is the divan covered with Mongolian tiger skins, streaked with black. In the middle of the couch is a low table. Swimming in great globes are Chinese fish with the eyes of sea-divers, exophthalmic eyes, awaiting the weekly visit of the doctor who comes to look after them and feed them lice eggs. The court is paved with flagstones and divided in two by palms and green shoots: on one side, wicker chairs, cocktails; on the other, the dining table all prepared and the serving boys standing at attention. Overhead is a sky seen through bamboo trellises covered with woven mats. According as the court is bright or dark, the mats are rolled or unrolled like sails, and squares of sky appear framing a neighboring tree and composing views of a dense and sober art. Lanterns two feet high are lighted along the circular gallery, adorned by a wistaria vine whose stalk is grey and age-old.

I began with what was prettiest; the rest was European conversation, malicious gossip, bridge, leaves of absence, the exchange rate of the "dollar

mex," the anatomy of the women of the colony displayed in slices, assignations in the temples of the suburbs, and in general that social life which is like the partitions of the native houses, — dirty paper abounding in peep-holes. Conversation in Pekin is like the Jade Canal, — a cloaca disguised by a beautiful name. But the Canal is dammed up. Rome itself is less maliciously provincial. Everybody knows whom you saw an hour before, what curios you bought, and how much you paid for them. And the whole is spiced with the word *squeeze*. In the slang of England this means to exercise pressure upon some one; in the Far East it is equivalent to *pourboire*, *backsheesh*, palm-greasing, the Jew's commission, heightened by the idea of coercion, for it is always the superior who squeezes his inferior: the Government squeezes the banks, the banks squeeze their clients; generals squeeze merchants, and head-waiters squeeze their subordinates on pay-day. . . . More conversation: the increasing girth of the Director of Customs; has or has not Mme. X— the "handsomest breasts in Pekin"? it is an absolute fact that the cellars of a certain Legation are crammed with wealth hidden there by certain Chinese, and as the precious objects are stowed away or unearthed, the Ministers send alarmist or optimistic cables to

their foreign offices at home; the Americans have built a radio station in order to be able to shell the Russian Legation whenever the Bolshevist Minister, that wolf in the sheep-fold, decides to knife his colleagues. Absolutely! . . . At noon the diplomatic corps is dipped into the frog-pond constituted by the pool in the American Legation. On pony-back at six in the evening, about the Temple of Heaven, we witness the deification of the multiple- and black-armed god of slander, like those Hindu gods who trample bulls themselves in the act of possessing women.

While we dine there comes from out of doors the sound of carts, the tinkling of the bells worn by the grey asses, the grating tones of the water-seller, the rattle of tongs or the cymbal of the soup-venders, the timbre of the rickshaws, the cry of the Bactrian camels mingled with that of the night watch.

Temple of Heaven

The arrival in Chinese waters some seventy years ago of a few European battleships sufficed to bring about the eventual disappearance and dissolution of the Gods, the Emperors, the Court, and the Rites. The acid strength of our power. The high colloquy between the Emperor and the elements is hushed. When January comes there is no longer anybody to render account to Heaven of his administration during the previous year. But it is true that no one on earth renders account to Heaven any longer.

Unforgettable morning spent in solitude in this observatory of the infinite, this Temple of Heaven, which is merely three disks of white marble, their flags faultlessly joined and converging towards the centre where, at the sacred axis, the sacrifice was accomplished. A low Temple, perfect, rational, spiritless, flattened to the ground; its very mass and solidity make it the centre of China, the Middle Country. It has the fascination of a target; one cannot take one's eyes from it to look at those visual amusements, the blue-tiled oven, the green-

enamel roof over the slaughter-house of the votive animals, or even the great deserted gardens which, it appears, are to give place to a railway station.

Rebuilt under Kien Lung at the height of a period of decadence, the Temple has nevertheless preserved the strength inscribed on it by the ancestors. The baroque dragons that decorate the steps and the inclined planes leading to the upper level, to the smooth surface of the altar, do not detract from its majesty. What does it matter that these giant millstones have no longer any grist to grind? What does it matter that the members of the Diplomatic Corps use this mirror of the skies as a picnicking table? This Temple is still one of the most moving and most geometrical scenes on the globe.

Pekin-Purow Limited

Down across the flooded Tien-Tsin plain where barks float two feet above the harvest. Then, the flood receding, appears a silt the color of rosewood or of strong tea clouded with milk. Barks in the barley. Farther on stand peeled mountains crowned with watch-towers inhabited by terra-cotta peasants of a form and color a thousand years old, like the funeral cavalry placed in the coffins of the Tang period to serve the dead.

An American train (for which the Americans were never paid, by the way), its washrooms filled with the red mud of the Yang-Tse, its fly-traps, its electric fans humming in the heat during the stops in the middle of fields, its curry brought twice daily to the drawing-rooms, and its six guards, armed to the teeth in order to escort a conductor who comes through to punch holes in the tickets. Lackadaisical soldiers in loose-hanging uniforms, worn with ill-grace as always by poor soldiers or men of unmilitary race; an unreal militia, transparent, light, very like those paper effigies carried in the funeral processions.

Shanghai

"I should like to go back to Asia," Blasco Ibañez said to me on the morrow of his tour of the world, "only in order to write the novel of Shanghai."

At the first view of the Yang-Tse, which debouches long before the coast is seen, inundating even the sea with rosy silt and drowning in the Pacific all that earth torn from the entrails of China, I had a premonition of a great spectacle. Night has come on; I see fires; but it is chiefly in the sound of the heavy, viscous water, the slime of genesis, that I sense Shanghai. A district of warehouses, filled with international merchandise and bearing all the names of the earth. Freighters in dock; others in midstream, surrounded by rafts and tankers. Red and black coolies, most of them flat-chested women, are loading coal in baskets, following one another like the buckets of a dredging machine. The river is blocked by a chaos of launches, junks, liners, and the entire flotilla of a British river navigation company which has taken

refuge here after being boycotted in the interior. And there are white gunboats and cruisers with unmuzzled guns pointed towards the Concessions. In the evening Shanghai is cut in two by a comet of street lamps, — Boulevard Joffre, which marks the north-south limit of the French Concession. Beyond lies a black hole with, one feels, all China awake in the darkness awaiting its hour.

Spasmodic conflagrations of publicity. Sky-scrapers on fire. The hanging gardens of the Plaza, the Majestic, the Carlton. The greatest hotels and houses of prostitution in Shanghai belong to the Spanish Fathers. On these roofs *de luxe* dance the wives of British naval officers from Wei-Hai-Wei, judges of the Claims Commission, and Russian refugees. The tragic entry of a music-hall turn: six women, three got up as yellow jockeys and three as pink horses. What are Asiatic epidemics compared with these Western poisons?

I am taken to the *Grand Monde* in a car driven by a chauffeur dizzy with opium whose long black hair streams wildly in the wind. He does his best to pass the cars of Englishmen who have reached their thirty-fifth whiskey and soda for the day. Our spiral race is rectified by Sikh policemen standing at the crossroads.

The *Grand Monde* is a nocturnal caravanserai, a sort of Coney Island erected for the Chinese. In panama hats or bare shaven heads, a fan or a bird-cage in the hand, they stop in fascination before all the booths — the roulette wheel where coolies win packages of cigarettes; mechanical lotteries; nickelled toboggans down which slide ivory balls to emerge through a faucet and pour over a table. There are a number of restaurants and theaters. Beside each theater seat, a newspaper and three apples await the spectator. Here we have an heroic drama with clashing cymbals, falsetto ventriloquistic voices, and Manchu princes wearing great black beards and red and blue costumes decorated with trumpeting embroidery. Elsewhere we see a farce in which witticisms are exchanged between an old and a young woman, the faces of both plastered with white paint.

The settings are even more bare than those of Shakespeare's age, of which they are reminiscent. Whereas, to indicate a horseman, the Elizabethans wheeled about in horse-skirts, the Chinese come on stage bearing simply a whip in the hand. When an actor comes in presumably from out of doors, he lifts his feet over an imaginary threshold. The play itself is a rather silly fairy-tale with a moral purpose. Chinese men of letters have despised the

dramatic production of their country, and abandoned it to the vulgar speech. One would hunt in vain for the equivalent of the Nô plays which, despite their tardy appearance, are the essence of Japanese chivalric literature. As for the racket carried on in the orchestra, the grating and discordant accompaniment of the action, recent research has disclosed that it is a Mongolian importation which has usurped the place of the truly melodious and suave music of China whose disappearance every ear must regret.

Men with greenish jade faces hover about the opium-smoking paraphernalia. Students discuss politics. Painted inverts, the little "half-brothers" of "the flowers," as the dainty prostitutes are called, — the famous flowers of Shanghai, their hair lacquered with cocoanut oil, a camelia at the nape of the neck, the eye scarcely visible at the corner of the flat nose, gold-diggers who dissipate fortunes, vampires who drain away Mexican dollars, pass in rickshaws through the vertical posters that dangle in the streets, covered with red or black lacquer and letters in gold. They seem to be moving through the leaves of a great open book standing on end.

International police, international concessions. Suddenly the Sikh police give way to Annamite

sharpshooters: we are in the French Concession. Beyond is the Chinese city. Unemployment in the street of the mah-jong makers, for already America has stopped playing the game. The men are bare to the waist, their bodies red as lacquered duck. They wear those admirably cut Chinese trousers of black waxed silk which replace the robe more and more as one travels towards the south. Children splash in the gutters, each wearing a collar so that the demons may be deceived into taking them for dogs. Hoarse Chinese cries, hysterical disputes, insults brought up from the depths of the throat. What a contrast with the calm and empty streets of Japan! Silk merchants. Their bolts are laid out in gradually diminishing intensity of color, like pastels in a box. Admirable silks unknown to Europe, thick, tough as canvas and endowed with infinite life, decorated with geometric designs, letters, hieroglyphs. Pongees and crepes impossible to praise too highly.

Shadowy taverns in which the pale amber torsos of the cooks and the stupefied and phosphorescent frequenters are seen against a background of soot, forge fire, and iron pots in which children seem to be boiling, boilers filled with biological cultures in a state of decomposition.

Here is the end of the Concession. The American

schools are on the left. In front of us lie ditches and barbed wire. Battles were fought here a few months ago. Behind those blue bamboos begins the China of the interior, where the Whites were still the masters yesterday and where they may, perhaps, never enter again.

The Longest Bar in the World

Noon is the hour devoted to the longest bar in the world, the hour of the Shanghai Club. A series of immaculate helmets, lined up like mounds of snow beside a road, fills the checkroom. The doormen are tall Sikhs wearing the turbans of India and the only beards to be seen in smooth-shaven Asia. They stand motionless in a doorway that seems buttered with marble. The door opens and I see the parallel lines of the bar running like steel rails. Fifty yards long. In the arched oven-like openings, doubled by their reflection in the mirrors, stand a thousand bottles, each containing its demon, its climate. In the ceiling a hundred ventilators, whirling and roaring in unison, dry the soaked backs through the pongees, the shantungs, the palm-beaches, and the tussores. Like animals at a trough, these red-faced drinkers — there are five hundred of them — shoulder and elbow one another, crowd in a knee. On the other side of the counter, pale, tea-drinking Chinese pour out the cordial poisons to their white enemies. We attack them with opium in this toxic duel; they riposte with alcohol.

The clatter of poker dice rolling on the bar. Like a Wagnerian motif, and as far as the eye can see, stand those bottles which form the basis of every bar's stock in trade: colorless but not unsavory gin, pale sherry, Latin vermouths, Angostura, sweet syrups, hot orange-bitters.

Cocktails: concise alcohols, further subdued by the chill of ice; a sudden union of all the forces individually lost in their bottles. They form a pool of equatorial melancholia, a sort of highly concentrated bliss, that strikes the drinker like a blow of the fist. (Where is the caress of wine?) They are the balm of the Tropics. Not to mention the ordinary cocktails, we have here the Bamboo cocktail, drunk by the Anglo-Indians; the Blenton, of the Royal Navy; the Hula-Hula from Hawaii; the gin fizz disembarked by the P. and O. liners. Occasionally there are sweet cocktails from the south: the Sol y Sombra from San Sebastian, a union of two liqueurs, shadow and sun, a bull ring; the Brazilian Chocolate cocktail, — chartreuse, port, and powdered fresh chocolate; the Yokahama Gibson, so curious with its little white onion; the H. P. W. Vanderbilt and the Bennett cocktails, named by obsequious barmen for American millionaires; and finally the Minnenoaba cocktail of the Indians, the "water-that-makes-you-laugh" cocktail.

There are cocktails from Java, from the Antilles, fruit-juice cocktails whose taste soothes the burn contracted by drinking Swedish punch; the Matila, containing white rum; slings made with cocoanut milk and green lemon; the Handicap, drunk by the Bubbling Well polo players; the Deep Sea, favored by the merchant marine; the Mayfair and the Luigi (the Italian owner of the Embassy Club in Bond Street), which are snobbish cocktails; the Pussyfoot, a non-alcoholic and shameful cocktail; the "75," a vestige of the war; the passionate Kiss-me-quick, the sentimental Love's Dream, and the poetic September Morn (Coty uses this name too). There is the South African Boomerang cocktail, and the Sensation, with its name of a languorous waltz. All the *apéritifs* of the French café's *terrasse*, all the humble *pousse-cafés* of the French restaurants, turn up in the Antipodes wearing brand new English clothes. Finally, behind the cocktails come the old patrician families: the coolers, cups, creamy egg-noggs, milkless flips with their oily yelk of egg, tonic fizzes, juleps, and Victorian cobblers.

The word cocktail is said to have originated as follows: A farmer once lost his best fighting cock and announced that whoever brought the bird home might have his daughter in marriage. A handsome

officer turned the trick. Of course they had to drink to the champion cock. The daughter brought forth a variety of bottles and commenced to pour. The officer was so handsome in his red uniform that the flustered girl mixed the drinks, and thus unwittingly composed a beverage speckled like the cock's tail. An accident is enough to open new worlds to man. . . .

Everything is going round. Through the open door is seen the street and, parallel to it, the Yang-Tse, both burned by a sun that comes down like thunder. Smoke sprawls, sirens twist, warehouses undulate. It is one o'clock. Why go any farther? Our imagination knows its limits. Our strength, too. We'll stay where we are. This is the longest bar in the world.

"Don't you believe it," says a neighboring drinker. "The longest bar in the world is in the Jockey Club at Buenos Ayres."

"Good Lord! I'll have to leave after all!"

Hong Kong

Another of those keys to the world that hang from the key-ring which should replace the trident as England's emblem. True, these keys are like those that hang from the girdle of Duerer's *Melancholia:* Hong Kong is growing rusty.

Already at Shanghai the slimy waters of the Yang-Tse are filled more with costly squadrons than with useful liners. "The god of war is great," says a Chinese proverb, "but one plugged coin is greater than the god of war." At Hong Kong, a British Crown possession, the port is deserted. All the freighters are congealed in a motionless jelly, whether because their cargoes lie unladen on the dock, or because they lie unladen in the hold. A coolie strike: mysterious orders of the Chinese unions affecting all the warehouses and immediately obeyed.

At Yokahama, the first Japanese port out of America, fifteen minutes after the arrival of our proud liner, she was deserted by the thousand Chinese members of her crew. At Hong Kong,

anonymous telephone calls are rung in the very homes of the British officials to find out daily if the striking servants have gone back to their work.

The purchase and sale of British merchandise is boycotted. Bit by bit revolutionary China is trying to force a surrender by commercial ruin and even by famine. It has shaken the credit of the great British banking fortresses of the Far East. A significant fact, unprecedented in this land where everything, even to the cocktails one drinks, is charged, is the placard one sees in the shops and the hotels: "Each payment will be of great assistance to us."

This is a new phase of the thousand-year old relations between China and the Occident, in which Japan plays its lone, attentive, and mysterious hand, and of which the only thing that can be said with certainty is that it will always be fiercely personal and national. Is China, one hundred years after opening its five treaty ports to western commerce, to throw the Whites back upon the coast, or into the sea? And the Whites, after having lost their privileges by force or otherwise, are they to be overcome by the law of might which they have so often invoked?

These Sino-European relations were born of the

Pacific search for a silk route, first through Central Asia, then via the Indian Ocean, and finally in the discovery of America through Columbus's error in navigation. And today, two thousand years later, chance brings the two races face to face in the silk market of Canton, this time with machine guns. Is this human progress? As a matter of fact, it is no longer silk that is in question. The mercantile interpretation of the world which rendered the professor's task so easy in 1900 is no longer accepted. Now the universe is led by spiritual forces, and the struggle is a mystic one in which the adversaries can be content only with total victory.

Many people have been disappointed by England's passive attitude. They do not realize that of which England is aware: that a few Chinese huts destroyed by cannon shot would prove nothing, and would mean merely that all would have to be begun again in this strange, unknown, novel South China, so different from the north, so independent of it in race and lanugage. The great international problems which left aristocratic Manchuria cold are simply another element introduced into the complexity of local wars and feudal conflicts between the South Chinese.

These South Chinese, a mixed race, violent, nervous, and further exasperated by a half-culture

acquired in Europe or America, have reacted at the moment chosen by those who were able to raise them in revolt against the most vulnerable, because the most enormous, capitalistic power of Europe. Canton represents the first blow aimed at London by Moscow. For us Frenchmen to rejoice in this discrimination would be folly. To the Asiatic, all Whites are alike and form one people. Others will follow, and we in our turn. Facing ignorant, isolated, divided, sceptical Europe, whose eyes are only half opened to the superficial simplicity of the conflict of the day, is an ardent, coherent, methodical, and perfectly conscious doctrine, tending with all the strength of its leaders towards the destruction of an old society whose defense is undertaken with the arms of peace against an adversary attacking with the arms of war.

Three pictures:

Stuck in the middle of the Yang-Tse is a steamer flying the red flag of Soviet Russia with its hammer and golden sickle. Our stokers come up from the hold to look curiously at this ship. They are fine-featured, tired-faced Europeans who have replaced the striking Chinese: doctors, lawyers, middle class Russians from Petrograd and Moscow now working as laborers and eating the coolies' rations of rice.

Curious encounter of the two Russias in these yellow waters.

On the walls of the concession at Shanghai I saw a tricolor poster. I came closer and read: "Young communists of France! Down with capitalism! French sailors, remember the Black Sea!"

In Pekin a few days ago, towards eleven in the evening, the gates were closed. We had been delayed on a sightseeing trip and had no pass back into the city. We decided to sleep by the roadside, out of doors. Little by little those behind us came up, and we collected in a crowd to spend the night under the Mongol walls. Behind them came camel caravans, the winter nap of the camels still clinging to their sides like wool to an old carpet. They knelt pretentiously to take their rest. I looked at the cases that made up their burden: Russian munitions come down from the Gobi desert, favored in their arrival by the dark night, coming scarcely more slowly than ideas into China.

What reply to this has Hong Kong, the Victorian rock, where men may yet dress for dinner and find no dinner?

Macao

Macao was the Portuguese Hong Kong in the sixteenth century; the first in point of time of all European colonies in China, and now the least remembered. We like to believe that travel, flight through space, will obliterate from our minds the flight of time. We are prone, also, to forget that countries grow old. Colonies, those illegitimate children, are there to remind us of the fact. There is no constant relation between the colonies and those exceptional moments of vitality, of youth, which provide a mother country with the desire, the need, or the opportunity to give birth to such offspring. Following geography, which tries to make us believe that what we possess has been and will be ours in eternity, comes history to teach us that the riches of the earth pass from hand to hand. The Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Spanish, the Dutch, and the English have, one after the other, held a certain island or continent; and the list of proprietors will never end. Life is a leasehold, not a freehold in fee simple.

These thoughts came to me by way of consoling the Portuguese, who were the first immense world

power, as we reached Macao. (The Portuguese deserve consolation, for they are, with the Rumanians, the only people who love France for herself and despite everybody, as one loves a woman.) Already the ship was passing the oldest lighthouse in the Far East, the first European flame lighted on these yellow coasts. It is squat, scooped out in the middle like a white capstan rolled round with clouds. We were moving in a flat body of water, curved in the form of a crescent. Macao hides its port behind its back and presents to the gaze of the newcomer only a southern mall, dozing in the shade of twisted banyans. Cafés, the invention of nations that do not drink. Arcaded houses, laundry-blue, raspberry, and water-green in color, served up like assorted ices. This might be Oporto or Coimbre. Macao looks today much as it must have appeared to la Perouse in 1787. Lightships, resting like Buddhas on a lotus, are slipper-shaped, like those pale blue bathtubs you sometimes find in country attics. Chinese junks mounted with bronze cannon lie waiting to be chartered by the merchant who wants his cargo convoyed to Hong Kong in security against the pirates. It may even be that lucky gamblers put themselves under the protection of these junks, for Macao is the gambling house of the Far East.

After having lived on lotteries, the coolie slave trade, and opium smuggling, it lives now on Fan-tan. This — and the brothels in the street of Felicity — is what gives Macao the aspect of an old flower float, the personality of a faded private dining-room, that is unforgetable.

The taste for gambling goes from west to east, inversely over the path of civilization. It begins with the Greeks, goes on to the Jews, then the Russians and all the Orientals, ending finally with the Chinese. At this point the fever is at its height. Forget the formula: "The Yellow people have no nerves." The Yellow people are all nerves. You need only to have heard the tearing and hysterical laughter of the Japanese and the Chinese to appreciate it. In Manila, every man carries his fighting cock under his arm. In Siam they place wagers on fish fights or kite fights. Pekin bets on the results of school examinations, which is much as if American students gambled on Phi Beta Kappa elections in each college. You leave the fan-tan table with wrecked nerves. Roulette is the brutal invention of barbarians in a hurry; only the Chinese know how to make pleasure last.

Through provincial streets paved in a marquetrie of ancient stones, between rows of houses whose baroque and still pompous substance gives off an

emanation of debauchery and things forbidden, past gardens scarcely more tropical than those of Portugal itself, which has by force of mimicry evolved into a sort of European Indies, I reach the cathedral. Either an earthquake or a conflagration has left standing only the façade. There is nothing but the sky in this church. To get here I had to pass through a port mortified by a long commercial fast. In these motionless streets, stupefied by the siesta, I see phantoms of half-breeds, with that astonishing green and mauve, lunar and phosphorescent pallor of half-breeds. Lawyers, like all half-breeds. I think of Camoëns, exiled here, writing his Lusiads here. He was a civil servant (who else is to be found in the Latin colonies?) and bore the Dantesque title, *Provedor dos defuntes e asuentes*, which is to say, more or less, Commissioner to the Defunct and the Absent.

A fellow traveler said to me: "Do you know the story of Saint Francis Xavier's corpse? This Portuguese saint died near Canton and was to have been buried at Macao. He did not stay here. The Government at Lisbon decided that the Apostle to the Indies should be transported from Macao to Goa, in India. But Macao clung so well

to the corpse that it finally came away with one arm. The saint was exhumed and buried long ago at Goa, where he hoped to find definitive repose. Lately, however, it was decided to bring the great missionary back to Lisbon. Goa held fast to its sacred relics, and succeeded in keeping the legs of the saint. These legs were ground into a fine powder which, when mixed with water, is a preventive of dysentery. The remainder — remains, would you say? — was finally carried to Lisbon in a cruiser especially sent out for this purpose. But the return took place with so much pomp and ceremony that Brazil became aroused and, as a former Portuguese possession, claimed an interest in the body, namely, the second arm. It is only the trunk of Saint Francis Xavier that now rests in the mother country."

Manila

After the aridity and the toughness of disforested China, we encounter here the great insurrection of nature, the Tropics. Two days distant by sea from Hong Kong (one of the wicked seas of the globe) we come upon other colors and other fruits. The pictures are new, the themes are changed. Despite the unbearable rainy season and the hostile aspect of a sky lowering over a flat clayey coast, the scene is one of gentleness, — and this for the first time since I left Japan.

What you meet right off at Manila is the American trinity: the skyscraper, the stenographer, and the ice-cream soda. U. S. A. However, three steps away, beyond an ancient fortress whose battlements are gnawed by mosses and ferns, beyond Queen Isabella's cannon, and after traversing a labyrinth of Andalusian streets, you reach a pearl grey church and a group of pistachio convents, hiding their Jesuitical intolerance under a jubilant style of architecture. This is Spain. Farther away, along a third line of retreat, up the river, you come

upon all the shades of color of the first inhabitants of the islands, from the Malays to the humble negritoes, living in their huts on piles.

Manila is the mother of the typhoons that rage from July to November, first towards Japan and Corea in the north, later in the direction of the Malay States in the South, discharging their sudden anger squarely into the sails of the junks like stupid bulls plunging into the toreros' capes. Everybody lives with his eyes on the barometer, and scarcely a day passes but there is trouble in the port. In such season the junks, hitherto invisible, turn up from every direction and move in like a flock of sheep running before a wolf. The liners double their cables, send their engines roaring, and stand with vibrating hulls ready to resist the hurricane that strives to tear them loose from their moorings.

1521: the first voyage around the globe. I think of Magellan reaching Manila in one of these famous sunsets, on an evening like this when the orange sky fringed with grey seems like a Philippine shawl. He did not stop. But his lieutenants had taken their bearings; they came back. A charming age, when the bloody and sentimental navigator was free to baptise bays and capes with the names of his friends or his mistresses, and when the chapters of

narratives could be fearlessly entitled: "Joy of the natives at the sight of the King's caravels."

A soft, hot earth which the white man exploited by repeated kicks in the belly, as a procurer exploits a street-walker. Arrogant monopolies; coast-wise trading with Acapulco and Mexico. Spanish galleons bringing back to Cadiz their heavy equatorial tributes. Themselves the victims of the English corsairs, when Drake's share of a single prize was a million dollars and he sailed home all the way from the Philippines to London with sails of crimson damask and cables of pure silver to go and drink a skin of sack at the Mermaid Tavern with Shakespeare or Ben Jonson. . . . The women of Manila still wear mutton-leg sleeves and curious collarettes that rise at the back of the head and are a form of Colonial deference towards the Spanish fashions of the late sixteenth century, a touching evocation in pineapple fibre of the "strawberries" and the Medici collars worn by Dulcinea. "We all have Spanish blood in our veins" says my chauffeur proudly, with his bare black foot on the accelerator. And American money in their pockets.

For Manila, thanks to the Americans, is prosperous. Its fine woods and its cigars fetch high prices. The white masters are not loved, but what whites ever were loved? The Spanish were hated

even more furiously. Only the old people still speak the beautiful Castilian, at once light and metallic, that was the very language of Cervantes. The young speak American, a cordial and vulgar barking. At the cock-fights, after the gallinaceous birds have been pulled like duelling pistols out of their leather boxes and have begun to pluck and hack one another, Yankee war cries and whistles, and not those magnificent taunts that do credit to the Latin languages, in particular the Spanish, greet the decisions of the umpire, the *sentenciador*.

These men with their shirts blowing in the wind (for they wear their shirts outside their trousers) and an orchid in their hair are beginning to prefer boxing and dancing to other sports. Through the screens of the colonial houses, they watch the wives of American officers glide over the floors of polished teak. Here people dance at every meal to the sound of the voluptuous Philippine music, the sister of the Hawaiian waltz. And these young men, fascinated by the trans-Pacific lights, have only one idea, which is to leave their indolent Paradise and go to work in San Francisco, on the forty-eighth story of some bank, in shirt-sleeves with rubber bands circling their arms, forgetting the beautiful evenings on the shores of the Pasig, where naked negroes in top hats kill fish with the bow and arrow.

Tropical Fish

The aquarium is hidden inside the massive walls of the Spanish fort at Manila. It has none of the blinding luxury of the aquarium of Honolulu, the finest in the world. But what a variety of creatures in its few glass cases! Each century must have set its subaqueous style, and each zone of depth its fashion. Let others make water routes their line of division between countries, and still others (less stupid than the first), classify them by maritime basins. I propose classification by fish. The Aquarium of London, where the tide comes up expressly from Brighton; that of Berlin; and that of New York. The Aquarium of Monte Carlo, probably placed of purpose beneath the Casino, to prove that luck is liquid and that the world really rests, as the Hindus say, on two fish. And doubtless when the gamblers' fortunes disappear into the glaucous green of the tables, they sink deeper and float like submarine derelicts on the water. The Aquarium of Naples, outside the Vormero and its crowded population, in the direction of the sea. Medusas navigate there like jellies on an English table, a sort of unclean food in search

of a mouth; best of all, the unforgetable spotted muraena, the water panther with its brutal jaws, rubbing its belly on a carpet of old tiles that seem to be the roof of a flooded house. Carrying their taste for the baroque to its greatest depth, the Italians have taken the fruits of the sea and built for these fish a variety of orange-colored landscapes that are like the pebble palaces of the same color built by their architects for the Czars at Petrograd. The poor, touching Aquarium of the Trocadero in Paris where, coming away from school, we used to meet in secret among the gudgeons and the eels.

The Equator, tellurian centre, power plant of the globe, the true switchboard of currents, of the circulatory system of the earth, drawing towards it all the rarest species. Flat, plate-shaped fish, tailless, with unprotruding fins; others which seem to turn inside out in this too hot water; still others with high sails, caught in the currents as by the wind; the *ulan-ulan* which is sapphire blue, thin as a dress-waistcoat watch, and of an incredible cobalt color which, if diluted, would suffice to discolor the Pacific; the *puffers boteti*, poisonous when exposed to the air; the lion fish of the south Pacific, pink and blue, with the antennae of a lobster and a tail of guinea fowl feathers the color of dried blood like that seen on the Oceanic war-masks and shields; the *las-las*, wearing the blue and black

stripes of a French prison uniform; the *anabas testudinian*, that lives out of water and climbs trees; the scaley inhabitants of the coral caverns, like madrepores in form and color, cropping their pink grass; fish with feathers and those with moustaches, and those that are poisonous to some and edible to others; those from the Gulf of Siam that come at night to bump their noses like the souls of drowned men against the hulls of barks; fish from the Yellow Sea which the Chinese tattoo; fighting fish, transparent fish. All shapes: conical, polygonal, spiral. Comical and terrible; armed with hammers, trumpets, pea-shooters through which they send drops of water that bewilder their adversaries. The ferocity of the equatorial jungle, that mutual devouring whose only equal in virulence is procreation, lives again under water. Great sharks pass, electric torpedoes, sea bats, lampreys, deadly congers fattened with the flesh of their kind, swelled to bursting with aloes, protozoa, jellied medusas, oblique crabs, detached polyps. Sometimes a new species swims into their ken — divers avid of pearls who, when their fishing has been fruitless, seek in the cabins of the liners sunk in typhoons the pearls strung helplessly about the necks of beautiful drowned women. They plunge head foremost under the surface, showing the mouth-red soles of their feet.

Borneo

This morning, while our ship moved forward off Borneo — a flat horizon ready to leap in the air — I thought of Bernard singing at the Eldorado:

"*In Borneo where the skies are blue.*"

This sinister, slightly warped, sticky coast, this abominable mud that is like a mass of infusoria, this melancholy sponge on which the rain falls the year round (except during a few days in December), this island infested by pillaging Dyaks, black panthers, naga serpents, puts me in mind of the waltz-song pouring out of the blue, powdered throat of Bernard while an audience of Boulevard-de-Strasbourg thugs and procurers sighs with envy.

Saigon Nights, an *Idyll at Colombo*, the *Javas*, and so on, — those marvellous, nostalgic songs of Paris, so awkward in their impoverished imagery, so touching because they are written and sung by and for "the masses." But much more than the middle classes, the masses touch these islands through their fathers, who are customs guards here (and perhaps, like Henri Rousseau, send

them paintings), or their kid sisters, "working in a house." But where are the "intoxicating nights" of the happy colonials "sitting on the top of the world" as they do at Bougival, I wonder while we skirt this scene that looks like the emergence of life on earth.

Singapore: Capital of the Animal Kingdom

Singapore is not the most beautiful city in the Tropics. But is there a tighter knot that joins the continents, the oceans, and the colonies, a more inevitable crossroads, a public square more crowded with races and colored by nature?

Singapore, the City of the Tiger, is also the great world market for wild beasts. Eternal and inexpiable prisoners of war, they arrive from the depth of the jungle and the tips of the trees, streaming towards a few Chinese shops that stink of the carrion of vultures, the musk of rats, the odor of civet cats rising in the smoke of incense burned to the protecting Buddha. Down from the Malay States to Singapore come pythons; from India come cobras, from Siam elephants, from Indo-China tigers, from Borneo honey-eating bears, from Sumatra orang-outangs, turtles, parakeets; from Java come those stupid armored cruisers the rhinoceroses, and the tender tapirs; from everywhere come monkeys, gorillas, macaws, gibbons. . . .

Zoos, menageries, and circuses send to Singapore for their stock in trade. Scenes of childhood

come to mind: the supple pyramids, the geometric figures formed by tigers erect on their white buckets, and above them, like a piece of raw meat ever promised and never obtained, the scarlet, be-tassled tamer and his whip that sends forth flames without smoke. Royal tigers, their coats striped in perfect imitation of the shadows that fall from the bamboo trees on the tawny ground. Those I used to see at the *Nouveau Cirque* in the *faubourg Saint-Honoré* came, doubtless, from Marseilles, from Hamburg, or from Brione, that strange island in the Adriatic where Hagenbeck used to keep his reserve stock; an island now become Italian, deserted, its cages empty, with a few abandoned monkeys flying through its cork-oaks and staring across at Pola. If animals possess a sentimental memory they must think back to a long sea voyage rolled by the monsoon, to the charming Chinese garden with its potted palms and orchids in the suburbs of Singapore, where I am this evening, and where they were brought by the long-haired black men who had captured them, and were left in exchange for those little balls of solid silver that are the money of the country.

Coming from America, I traveled with Orpheus. He is an American citizen with a Dutch name and an Indian profile; a handsome, deeply marked

face, hard and fine-featured. An animal broker. His life is spent between Singapore and the great zoölogical centers of America, — those that are richly endowed and are ready to spend any sum in order to secure the handsomest beasts. He charmed me as if he himself had been one of those beasts, and I was ready to drop everything and share his life. Occasionally he would join in a hunt himself, one of those most difficult of hunts, since the beasts had to be captured alive. Thus, one day he was tracking a monster gorilla. It came down from its lair, and in the pool to which this giant went to drink, my American poured a native fermented beverage. It was an unconscious and dead-drunk gorilla that was shipped off to Philadelphia that same evening.

At other times my new American friend has waited for the jungle to come to him. Dressed in white silk he would sit at the Raffles in Singapore, drinking Million Dollar cocktails. His orders were given and he could only hope they would be filled. Enter the Chinese middle men. A boat from Borneo is announced. On board is a young orang-outang, hairy as a cocoanut, stretching forth, between the bars of the bamboo cage, two arms as desolate as the branches of the willow tree. He is so wild that he has to be put into a sort of straight

jacket; but he escapes from his keepers and leaps, arms wide and ready for an embrace, towards the American. My friend knocks him out with a punch on the point of the jaw, then pulls out his check-book and has his opponent loaded on a freighter bound for Seattle.

Another time he was taking back a panther which escaped from its cage on the liner. All the passengers were locked in their cabins that day and the beast was hunted from deck to deck. Finally panic stricken, it jumped overboard into the sea. Four sharks played water polo with it until there was only a blot of blood on the surface of the sea.

None of the prisoners become acclimatized in the European gardens of acclimatization at London, Amsterdam, Antwerp, or elsewhere, those beautiful picture books in which we study natural history, those distant echoes of the Tropics, those most magnificent albums of the child's world in which everything is at once true and magical. How well I understand the lovers of wild animals, — English and Dutch, most of them, — who have private collections in their misty gardens and grow homesick for the life of the equator with its prodigious variety of colors

and shapes! One of my friends, Sir D. Ross, Director of the School of Oriental Languages in London, was charged with the duty of organizing an Oriental procession during the exposition at Wembley. As he had need of elephants, he advertized in the newspapers, calling upon elephant fanciers to supply them. Within the week he had offers from the various counties of England of one hundred pachyderms who were living tranquilly in the private grounds of England. This is an indication of the love of nature and of animals that is one of the most lovable traits in the Anglo-Saxon temperament and is only beginning to display itself in the French.

How little these great beasts, who cannot forgive their captors, return the proof of kindness and strength displayed in the love of animals, or that sympathy that draws me to them! I cannot forget the hatred in the glance of a black panther that was separated from me by a thin, perforated partition, and voiced its fury in a hollow and terrible rumble. There was a young tiger (price, seven thousand francs) with a head too big for its body and great awkward paws, which, at the sight of me, turned on its back in battle posture, its maw open, and spat into my face. In boxes like the drawers of a chest lay parcels of marshmallow,

motionless and awake, covered with tattoo patterns, — eighteen-foot boa constrictors. They were covered with diamond-shaped lozenges, dull green, ochre, and arid brown in color, reminiscent of the very modern compositions of a Braque or a Juan Gris. They lay waiting, their bodies resigned and their eyes filled with fury.

I dream of a covenant of security between men and animals, each ceasing to obey the law of the jungle and promising love and respect for the other; tigers coming like brothers to Singapore to have their teeth treated by the Japanese dentist or their moustaches pulled out by the Chinese barber, even going to be admired in the zoölogical gardens, which would be like so many hospitable hotels; and then going freely back into the equatorial forests. But how could we conceal from them the fact that men eat meat?

The Swallow-Nest Islands

We passed the Swallow-Nest Islands a little before sunset. Bathing one behind the other, they are immersed up to the nostrils, like so many water buffaloes. They form one broad jungle whose moist flats and unbroken colors dissolve softly into one another. Aside from their horned and rocky angles, they have no sharp lines. We are on the border between Malaysia and Siam. The little East Asiatic Company freighter, pedaling and scrubbed like those girls who come into Copenhagen mornings on their bicycles, hugs the coast, sheltering itself against the monsoon and dipping its five hundred tons into the tropical sea that is so gummy with life.

These edible islands are rare in the world. There are some in the Indian Ocean to the north of Madagascar, at Singora, in Malaysia, and in a few corners of the Pacific. These are farmed out to Chinese (naturally; all contracts calling for bids end with the Chinese) at four thousand francs per annum. The nests gathered here are the whitest, the heaviest, and the most nourishing of all. They are called Kong Ean.

A South China comprador explained all this to me in a kind of English that he delivered with prodigious rapidity so that one might imagine mistakenly he knew the language. The wind blew into his waxed trouser leg. He showed me the swallows. They look like double fish-hooks mounted on arrow-heels. I had often seen them at sea without knowing that they served as food. These are not the French birds that are shown among the tattoo patterns in port with a motto in their beaks. These swallows avoid cities, do not migrate, do not sniff without discrimination at every fly, and do not build their nests hastily out of anything they can find; these are wild swallows who live on the high seas and spend one hundred days in the building of their nests. Their mortar is furnished by their saliva, which is a cross between the white of egg and the spider's thread, an essence of all that is richest and most exquisite in the sea. Rats and boas watch greedily for the moment when the nest is cemented to the rock; they adore these nests. So do men. They go with shovels into the depths of the caves to tear away the nests by torch-light. Sometimes they find that the bats have been there before them. There are terrible combats between the swallows and the bats. When the bats win, the swallows fly away,

and thus the income from one of these islands may drop in a single year from nine million to four million francs. This is an example of the "lottery of the seas" that Michelet speaks of in his pages on fishing.

The Swallow-nest Islands. At these words the mouths of Chinese epicures water, exactly as children's stomachs are excited by the volcanoes of caramel, the quarries of bonbons, and the rivers of chocolate in German tales. Graded in three categories of quality, the nests are shipped to Hong Kong, where the Chinese pay dearly for them. Like all the luxury of the East, the luxury of the Chinese is hidden. They know that ostentation is distasteful to the powers and the gods. Their only visible extravagance is their funeral procession, for once dead they have nothing to fear. Meanwhile, they feast their friends only in private dining rooms. An outlay of four thousand francs for a dinner of five or six is common. As in Soviet Russia, a royal feast is the first luxury because it does not show. A Chinese in easy circumstances (and I am not even speaking of the very rich merchants of Hong Kong, Cholon or Bangkok) will readily pay four hundred francs a pound for his tea.

After a night of feasting and expenditure, it is sweet to wake up and, in this epicure's hour, eat a nest which has first been soaked in boiling water and sugar. As saturated in iodine as kelp, in salt as a wave, in phosphorus as a fish, this fruit of the slow work of the swallows pours new strength into the debauchee. Hidden in the depths of those Chinese hotels stabbed by sounds, dilated by fluttering lamps, where the mah-jong pieces rattle like machine-gun fire, where the smokers absorb more dope than poppy and hemp can give, health returns in the concentrated and matutinal form of the swallow's nest, that "Bovril" of the fish, that extract of the halcyon, that jam of the tempest.

Siam

One cannot but love this isolated, self-contained little country that is the last refuge of Asiatic absolute monarchy, this land of torpid happiness and living faith. A description of it ought to be faithful and simple and slightly childish, like the descriptions of the Jesuits and of Louis XIV's envoys; a serene and accurate graph that would rest the mind fatigued by literary propaganda and tourist publicity; a clear picture of the last traits of an Asia no longer to be found in India, in China, or in Indo-China. Two years hence the Siamese railways will be joined to those of Burma on the west and Cambodia on the east, and the trip from Angkor to Bangkok will be made in a day. Later, the transcontinental trunk line, of which the greater part has already been built, will connect Calcutta with Rangoon, Bangkok, Saigon, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Pekin. A new Asia will emerge, and the Asia represented by Siam will be only a memory.

Protected by the barrier of its river, the bad maritime reputation of its gulf, the inadequate

development of its rail line, and the absence of highways, Siam is usually excluded from the itinerary of globe-trotters; they balk at the notion of a three-weeks detour.

"Bangkok? Oh, yes; the colonies; Indo-China," people say vaguely in Paris. (The Frenchman's ignorance of geography and the German's excessive familiarity with it both end in imperialistic annexations.) The interesting thing about Siam is that here is a free country which has preserved the happiness of existing for its own sake and living in contentment under the law of a family which administers it as if it were this family's private property. Our Indo-China, — and even Cambodia, which is so near Siam, — knows nothing like this. Colonized countries are like caged animals, — their gleaming coats lose their lustre.

Of course, Siam offers nothing of burning interest in the history of the world, or in that of Asia. It is an anecdote, but a most charming one and one that has escaped the divers maledictions of our time.

Arrival at Bangkok

Who would suspect that line, so low in color and relief, melting so entirely into the horizon, to be Siam? Scarcely does one dare affirm, at the thought of the hot, sticky mud of the delta, that this is solid ground. Of a sudden the sea breeze dies, for the ship has stopped. Under the weight of a humid calm, henceforth to give way to no coolness, we wait for the rising tide that will allow us to cross the bar and move up the river in the three hours that separate us from Bangkok. Let us wait. From now on we must live without ardor. Let us cruise idly before this natural bar, built up by the silted sands and hardened by the hulls of ships stranded or sunk of purpose to prevent enemy squadrons, — the French gunboats, in particular, — from forcing their way upstream. It is said that the English once protested and asked the Siamese why they did not dredge this dangerous passage. "For the same reason," answered the Siamese, "that you refuse to build a tunnel under the English Channel."

"Lands of Siam, so low that they seem to have escaped the sea by miracle," write our old naviga-

tors. Alluvial plains, replenished daily by the red earth torn from the North. Once the bar is crossed, the horizon gives way and of a sudden parts. We enter a stream without banks where the mangroves, the arecas, the tamarinds, and the banana trees plunge squarely into the water. The forest is stuck in the mud. At Paknam, moored in the loam of the bank, we meet our first ship, the pagoda of the River, its mast standing in a snail-spiral, its plastery hulk rising above the jungle against an orange sky. It fills a whole island and establishes that contact between sky and water which characterizes these Burmese, Cambodian, and Siamese landscapes. We reach Paklat, inhabited by Burmese, where our great Provençal corsair, the Chevalier de Forbin, governor of Bangkok at the end of the seventeenth century, stretched a chain across the river by way of defense. It is here they hold those curious regattas of the hundred-oared canoes, those bewildering paddle races that partake also of the Lyonnese joust, for grappling, boarding, or any other fashion of obstructing an opponent is legitimate.

Before us lies, scarcely less delightful than in his words; the very scene described by the abbé de Choisy when he reached Siam in 1685 with, as they used then to say, the embassy of Louis XIV:

"The two banks of the river are lined with arecas and *coquiers*, which are green trees laden with fruits, monkeys, and birds. There blue birds, red birds, and others all yellow. . . . The prettiest are the egrets, which are white as snow and wear veritable aigrets on their heads. There are many animals," he adds, "in this county, for no one dares kill them for fear of killing his father. Metempsychosis is an article of faith among the Siamese."

Are we about to run into this green island in the middle of the stream? No; noiselessly and without shock we run through it; it is made up of water hyacinths, said to have been brought by tourists from Java, which have multiplied to the point of obstructing the traffic. The thick tufted banks unroll with never a clearing, cut now and then by a "klong" or canal which is at once a path, a waterpipe, and a sewer. At the confluence of river and canal stands a small group of lacustrine huts like the villas of the Brenta, but on piles and covered with dry palms. For a moment there appears on the right a flat landscape with several rice paddies that seem to come down of themselves and drink at the stream. A large body of water cuts straight across country over the shortest line, thus signalling our approach to Bangkok.

Each curve in the stream that we round presents a picture. Skiffs lie along the banks, covered with curved reeds; others, open to the sky, are filled with *paddy*, which is to say crude rice as it grows in the paddy. They lie waiting to be unloaded at the wharves of the hulling mills, after which they will return with a fresh load. Such scenes make of the environs of Bangkok an Oriental Rotterdam, a sort of barbaric Hamburg.

Rice and water: there you have Siam. "Swimming" rice, whose cultivation seems more like fishing, whose growth and harvesting establish the rhythm of the country. Rice paddies cracked like pottery in summer and inundated in the rainy season; rice paddies which, seen horizontally, are green lawns, and seen vertically are lakes. Twenty kinds of rice in Siam, sown and harvested exactly as was done two thousand years ago; still the object of annual ritualistic and ceremonial solicitation, freely responded to by this tropical earth which is able and knows how to dower its children. And water, the second element in its wealth, spreading in fertilizing floods, sifting into a thousand canals, soaking like some good thick soup this immense, triangular cloaca of Siam, caught between the equatorial forests to east and west and the mountains to the north. As late as

yesterday, water was still the only way of access to Siam.

Sent downstream at the slow rate of freight trains, floating logs come to meet us, guided by men who seem to be walking on the water, so deep do the logs float. This is the majestic and incorruptible teak, the wood used in ship building, temples, and strong boxes, against which the teeth of the white ants are worn away in vain; the Siamese teak which, now that the over-exploited forests of the English in Burma have begun to produce less than before, is coming to conquer the world market. While we advance, the allegorical offering of other local riches continues: Himalayas of dried fish (beside which the odor of the slaughter-house is a perfume, despite the tonic smell of the tarred ropes) awaiting shipment in commercial quantities to China. Happy Siam knows none but miraculous catches. We come upon high Chinese junks, profiting by the tide to escape. Their sails, creased like dried tobacco leaves, rise, spread, and swell. What we took to be a cargo of jars stirs: it is the red-brown torsos of the crew hoisting sail. Forward stand the divers. Later, when the junk is in midstream, they will plunge to seek out the schools of fish, and will come back on board to say where the nets are to be thrown. In this Buddhist

universe fishing is doubtless the only exception to the proscription which forbids the taking of life; and of it they say that the fish is not killed, it is merely lifted out of the water and dies a magnificent death.

Our way is blocked by freighters, anchored sailing vessels, tugs insufficiently tarpaulined swinging with the tide, their winches, topsails, chimneys silhouetted against the tropical sunset. Farther on we see the customs canoes with their white, blue, and red flags, and the lightships. On the right we pass the Concession quarter and the French Church of the Assumption with its two western towers; on the left, the old fashioned counter-batteries and the ancient Portuguese church; again on the right, the European legations with the white masts and flying flags that are hauled down at night, — they too looking almost like boats. Mounds of grass surrounded by white fences make one think of Meulan or Maidenhead. Behind is the white line enclosing the royal city and the palace, fortifications with Indian battlements decorated with lotus patterns. Above are strange quadrilaterals, fitting into one another and surrounded by fluted supports like prismatic causeways, curiosities of nature. These are the roofs of the Temples.

Bangkok

Here I think of Commynes' amazement on arriving at Venice, when he speaks of "the Grand Canal and the housings, all in the water." Until the end of the nineteenth century there was no traffic in Bangkok except by boat. Twice each day the tide would clean the "streets," saving the city from pestilence and giving it the enchanted air of lacustrine civilizations, of towns that seem ready at any moment to float away. With the exception of the Guidecca, Bangkok is rather more like Amsterdam than like Venice. It, and not Paris, should have been called Lutaetia, the city of mud. Water is at the bottom of Siamese life and religion. Every ceremonial rite, whether of birth, of death, or of coronation, demands ablution and purification by water. There are feast days when the populace throw themselves fully clad into the river. And I remember, too that ancient and curious ceremony in which the Siamese officials, gathered before the King, drink the water of allegiance. Standing about a pool, they sprinkle themselves with its water, at the bottom of which lie weapons.

Water being an unfailing conductor of thought, they thus draw upon themselves, in case of infidelity, the vengeance implied in these submerged weapons.

Bangkok lies flat under the eye, but it is difficult to grasp. Neither planes nor terraces are visible, nor is there any sign of that succession of ascending levels that makes certain cities so easy to understand. The highways are concentric but illogical, for the streets came last and had to adjust themselves to the whims of the canals which preceded them. There are several quarters: the Legation quarter, the Royal Palace quarter, and the Chinese quarter. As for the environs, they are inhabited by former prisoners of war: at Samsen, the Cambodians; at the mouth of the river, the Burmese; elsewhere, the Mons, the men of Lao, the Shans, and the Pegouans. In the beginning the Legations were built along the river where they must have formed an independent quarter analogous to that of the nineteen nations, mentioned by the old travelers. Bangkok was then merely a wretched fortress entrusted to the guard of a hundred Portuguese half-breeds who patrolled the stream below the capital, which was then called variously Siam and Ayuthia and was destroyed by the Burmese in 1767. The earlier capitals, Sawankalok and Pit-

sanulok, lay to the north. Bangkok was founded in 1782 by Chao Phya Chakkri, the ancestor of the present dynasty, after a successful war against Cambodia.

Very soon the Legations will abandon the river-side, fly from the noise and reverberation of the water, the evil smells, and the excessively costly ground, and take refuge in a new and more sanitary quarter, a sort of Siamese Passy. How we shall miss our old Legation then, with its old-fashioned colonial design, its modest enclave of French territory planted with banyans and bougainvillias and a one-hundred-seventy-five-foot mast flying our colors in the midst of the croaking of toads and bullfrogs! When the rains come the storms surround it with ozone and the thunder crackles over it. This house would be open to all the winds if there were any wind, for it has no walls. Its wide bays are bordered by openwork trellises through which the birds fly in and out. The reflection of the sun in the water enters and covers the ceiling with golden and vibrant wickerwork. There is no charm like that of these old tropical residences of wood, — windowless (window-glass is unknown between Shanghai and Aden), walls reduced to essentials, not the slightest defense against sovereign nature; nothing but a perishable shelter, like man himself. Out of doors,

in the brilliant night, the soft-footed native servants unfold the noiseless blue and green shutters and stretch across the threshold of the doorways to take their sleep. No telephone rings to irritate the sleepers. Spirals of perfumed herbs rise in smoke to drive off the mosquitoes. In the depth of the garden the river gleams between two trees, one of them reserved to crows and the other to red vultures. Women row past chewing betel and opening those wounds, their red mouths; curious figures with their short hair standing brush-like on their heads, their breasts crushed beneath a bit of cloth that leaves their arms and torsos bare. They are short, broad, thick, and curved over, preceded by generations of squat or swimming ancestors. Chinese merchants, each type with his own cry that echoes over the river, come up to the door of my office to present a floating display of pottery or a glandular regimen of green bananas. But the most beautiful thing to be seen comes in the morning, during the sacred hour of mendicancy, — boatloads of priests, all clothed in the same yellow poplin thrown over one shoulder leaving the other bare, and so admirably draped as to be a proof of the theory of Graeco-Indian art according to which the noble art of drapery (Gandhara) is said to have passed in Alexander's time from Greek sculpture to Asia, to the Hindus, and to the Chinese.

The Chinese Quarter

The Sampeng, or Chinese quarter of Bangkok, is Southern China on foreign soil, exactly as at Singapore, Cholon, Hanoi, and Manila. Everybody knows the invading, avid, hard-working Chinese; scrawny in the streets and plump in the shops; under-bidding everybody and taking over all the monopolies; lending to the poor for their needs and to the rich for their pleasures; the last to bed and the first awake; rousing everybody with those firecrackers set off to drive away the evil spirits of the night; living on the country, draining its reserves, depositing them in Chinese banks, subsisting by the grace of the Chinese coöperatives so that none but Chinese may profit in any way; members of secret political societies, and never leaving the scene of their profits except in coffins. All the important works and all the trade of Siam are in the hands of the Chinese, in the cities, at any rate. They despise the Siamese, who reciprocate the sentiment, although they seem to be less hated here than in Indo-China. Outside the towns the Siamese are good farmers and fishermen, hard-

working despite their reputation for heedlessness, frivolity, and low intelligence. It is true that their Oceanic temperament makes them indolent, but who nowadays can afford the luxury of laziness? The Siamese officials no longer enjoy sinecures and the day has gone by when they were found exhausted by their siestas on benches, or taking tea and playing chess in their offices. The country is very well administered. The Europeans, as is well known, have surrendered their sanctions and live under the common law in Siam without finding any cause for complaint.

The first shop in the Sampeng is that of my flower merchant. Four young women are crowded into this noisy, busy booth, offering orchids at ten sous and pink and white lotuses, naked under their hair, so enormous that each is a bouquet in itself. To the coolies they sell tuberoses and fistsfull of jessamine. They wrap them in banana leaves stuck through with a thorn, — the standard Siamese wrapping. But the honors of the shop go to the flower wreaths that are like sword-knots ending in lengthened tassels, knots of intermingled color and perfume. They are like artificial flowers made of natural flowers. Each corolla — of mali buds — is plucked, dismounted, and built up again in different fashion. The wreaths are offered to

guests at the end of Siamese dinners. Even the Europeans, when they put on these great ribbons of the Order of the Garden, give expression to the taste for flower adornment which is essentially Polynesian and is to be found everywhere in the Pacific, in Hawaii, at Tahiti, at Manila, and among the Maoris of New Zealand. Despite its princes at Oxford, its airplanes, and its entry into the League of Nations, the Siamese nation is reminiscent in so many ways of the simple, primitive, playful, unintellectual and gentle Oceanic races, that it must have inherited from some common ancestor this taste for flower adornment discoverable even in Africa. I am thinking now of the Tunisians, crowned with roses in the doorways of their steam baths, and of our robust Mohammedan Senegalese on their feast days during Ramadan in the high streets of the Kasbah at Algiers, each with a flower behind his ear.

The shops are decked out with black and red flapping signs covered with gold lettering, and as I move forward through this hanging waterfall I am conscious that with only one head and two eyes it is impossible for me to see everything. Shopkeepers and clerks, naked at the waist, smiling and inscrutable, surround one at each attempt to effect a sale. Where, I muse, is the poor,

solitary, overwhelmed department store clerk, submerged by flocks of women? Under the awnings that almost touch and let through zigzagging and broken lines of sky, the heat is terrific. The odor of fresh English or German cotton goods is only less unbearable than the acrid perfume of Siamese tobacco, rolled and sausage-stuffed in lotus leaves that have previously been dried and pressed with a hot iron, or the smell of Burmese cheroots, black and twisted like the mandrake root. In one section are collected the engravers of seals, in another the silk merchants. Then come the apothecaries, the druggists who also sell tiger and panther skins; the shops where you buy yellow pork bladders covered with vermillion lettering and used as lanterns; venders of curry, the national dish, spiced with almonds, cocoanut, dried fish, powdered hard-boiled egg, and red pepper. In a dark alley the public scribes, silhouetted in candle light against a background of red paper, tame the demons who live in their writing. They write with amazing concentration, their noses down on the paper, so that you see only their black hair parted in the middle and their round, bare shoulders. A naked man writing is more moving than a naked longshoreman, and it is often the former who carries the heavier burden. Nothing approaches

the gravity of the tracer of letters. Once, during the siesta hour, I saw from my window a Chinese writing. He stirred his brush in the ink-well, drew himself together, and then began to write, leaning on the ledge of a little window cut into the wooden wall, and the roll of paper on which he wrote moved farther and farther out of the window until it hung down into my garden.

By the fracas in the street, by the shrieking of the gramophones, by the rattle of the mah-jong pieces sounding like hail on a zinc roof, you know yourself to be among the Chinese; but it is only when you come upon the pawnshops that China reveals itself in its entirety. Gamblers come to pledge their jewelry, their silken robes, and even their pipes. The more the pipes have been soaked and are incrusted with opium, the more money they fetch. They gamble on the State lotteries, on the cock-fights, the fish-fights, and, through the office of the bookmaker, on the races run at Shanghai, ten days distant from here. They gamble even on the number of seeds in a melon. It is recorded that naval officers who have been arrested and confined each on his own ship have continued to gamble at sea by signals.

In this quarter no European ever ventures afoot or carries a parcel. He would lose his prestige if he

did. This Oriental truth begins at Naples. The push-cart used in Europe for deliveries is here turned over to the cook for his marketing. There have been colonial officials who were astonished at the lack of respect shown them. They had been seen walking. And if they go so far as to make their own purchases, thus depriving the servant of his commission — one franc in the piastre — they are completely dishonored.

Jostling the skirted men of Lao, identifiable by their enormous toucan beaks which appear in their ancient statues of the Buddha, the red-turbaned Sikhs, the Cambodians, the Burmese, very black in their pink pantaloons, the Bengalis, the two-dimensional Javanese who are like the characters of their shadow-theatre cut out of buffalo leather, the American automobile of the Chinese merchant jolts through the crowd, sending the three painted concubines in the rear seat into the air like so many flapjacks, with fringes flying in the wind. Clerks or members of the family stand on the running-boards with wind-blown hair. Sometimes at night a Ford is seen sunken under the weight of fifteen people and lighted up by torch bearers. Cars and trucks driven by bare-skinned chauffeurs charge one another like buffaloes, avoiding a collision at the

last second, for in the Far East it is a matter of pride to force others to make way for you. The cars of the Chinese are six-cylindered; those of the high Siamese dignitaries, identifiable by the copper calf's head on the radiator, are generally models of thirty years ago. One of the most likable characteristics of Siamese life is this simplicity of people of quality, compared with the "super-luxe" of the Chinese profiteers and the Ritz-gigolo *chic* of the Indian rajahs. From time to time you see a very old carriage, a "malabar" with wooden wheels and torn curtains blowing in the air. Behind hangs a barefooted attendant, a last and rather touching souvenir of the lackeys of the Golden Age. Occasionally, too, peasant carts come into the city, hauled by slow moving water-buffaloes, each carrying a drover astride, a delousing bird. These bronze beasts dripping green mud and water, with their sickle-shaped horns two yards wide, bar the way most nobly. At night, to protect their eyes against the automobile lights, their drivers walk beside them with the buffaloes' heads tucked into their arms.

Bangkok should be visited at night when the sun has declared a truce and the relaxation of darkness has set in. Along one of the obscure, mysterious canals, a candle gleams suddenly

in a moored boat, lighting up a family at its supper, the bowl of white rice held close to the black lips. Elsewhere, men bathe in the brackish gravy of the canal, evacuate, and then cleanse themselves with water collected in old preserve tins. Here and there barks have been caught unawares by the receding tide and boatmen are seen, standing up to the thighs in the mud, straining to pull their craft out of the clinging slime. When you go to dine at a distance, you walk in white evening clothes beneath banana trees soaked in electric indigo, step in your patent-leather shoes on frogs and across monstrous, sticky roots that seem for a moment to be alligators; you raise your head, fearing nervously the drop of an areca nut or one of those saber-shaped pods that hang in curves above you. And when you come home along these stifling, humid canals in the intermittent light of the fire-flies, you can say with La Loubère: "Our ears were entertained by a barbaric but agreeable medley of songs, cries, and instruments in the midst of which our imagination delighted in the natural silence of the river."

The Temples

The temples are the glory of Siam and of Bangkok. Siam is the only absolute monarchy in which Buddha is worshipped. Through the artifice of Brahminism and the intolerance of Islam, the doctrine of Sakyamuni has been reduced to almost nothing in India; China no longer believes in it, and in Japan it has been so transformed by local cults as to render it unrecognizable. Buddhism still subsists in Southern India, in Ceylon, and in Cambodia, but it is losing, under the eyes of the British or French conquerors, the brilliance it yet retains only in Siam, which is manifested particularly in the construction and maintenance of sanctuaries. As a matter of fact, the sanctuaries are not very old. Travelers who gaze in ecstasy at the pagodas of Rangoon, at the Shwe Dagon, do not know that they were built in recent times. Except the Khmers, who built lastingly with sandstone, the pagoda builders used plastered brick which was essentially perishable, worn away from day to day by the climate and in constant

need of rebuilding by those among the faithful who desired to "acquire merit."

These temples or pagodas or *wats* are all built on the same plan. They are not mansions of the divine, for Buddha is not a god. They must be thought of, particularly in their origin, as houses built to shelter those sacred travelers, the priests, during the rainy season, while they studied their sacred books. The statues of the Perfect One exist only as a reminder to the faithful of His Law.

The pagoda properly so known is a square edifice, whitened with a plaster of lime and shaded by a porch or awning. Its doors and windows are of black lacquered teak, covered with a confused jumble of carved inter-twinings, foliage, and human figures. These Siamese temples form a sort of anthology of all the regional influences. The ovoid towers were added by the Khmers, who also perpetuated certain Brahminical remains such as the divinities and elephants who hold up the doorways and porches here and there. The reliquary monuments are of Indian origin, and the roof comes from China. Out of this compilation an originality is born. The whole history of Siam may be read at a glance: that of the free Thai nation come down from the north, from China, flinging

itself upon Siam in the twelfth century and throwing back the Khmers into Cambodia, the Mons towards Burma, and founding their capital, Ayuthia, in the fourteenth century.

The feature which remains in the memory and responds instantaneously to the thought of Bangkok is its temple roofs. Folded in two, straddling and fecundating one another, each roof gives birth to a second and then a third, the one rising up out of the other with their turned up corners and gables covered with motifs of *nagas*, that is, stylised snakes with head erect and tail in the air, gilded and scaly with flakes and incrusted mirrors. These roofs are closely related to the Chinese tiles that gleam in the sun like dry corn or darken the landscape with their blues, their green-edged violets, and their black surfaces. Only the reliquaries compare with them in brilliance, the cylindrical bells that stand in spirals forty feet high, some white, others covered with gold leaf, still others rising in incrusted terraces of porcelain mosaic reminiscent of their flower wreaths. The origin of these mausoleums filled with Buddhist relics, the *prachedi* as well as the *stupa*, the latter differing from the former only by their bulbous shape, seems to have been the funereal tumulus.

This luxuriant ornamentation of soul and style, this capricious play of line and color, this fashion of living at once joyously and religiously with none of the strange oppressiveness of India or the desiccation of China, is typical of Siam. Brahminical remains cling to this southern Buddhism and impregnate its rites and ceremonies. They have been welcomed here fraternally, as was Orpheus in the Christian catacombs. Caught between the Thai-Chinese Buddhism of the North and the Buddhism introduced towards 250 B.C. by the missionaries from Ceylon, the Siamese first adopted the latter and then amalgamated it with the primitive totemic worship, humanizing it and expressing Buddhistic gentleness to the full. Thus these temples live, enlivened by priests, children, idiots (who are so well loved throughout the East), dogs, lepers, beggars, venders of gold leaf, of rotted eggs, and of betel, — sanctuaries ever open, even to Europeans. The yellow-clad bonzes with their shaven heads are always willing to chat with travelers. These priests are to be found mornings seated among the offerings at the feet of the Buddha, surrounded by a group of brush-haired gossips. Some of the women lie asleep on the mats with their heads on pillows of wood; others are peeling their areca nuts and chewing pink betel, while

over them all drops the familiar, accessible, and tolerant teaching of the Perfect One.

Behind the pagoda lies a succession of flagged courts, each separated from the other by Khmer lions with curly hair and bracelets that seem almost Sassanian, their mustaches curled and their croups round, muscular, and tense. Sacred fig trees — called *bô* trees — the brothers of that beneath which the Knowledge was revealed to Buddha, provide shade and coolness.

What is the explanation of these trapezoidal shapes, these truncated pyramids to be seen in the line of the doorways, the windows, the lacquer cabinets, and everywhere in Siamese art? These lines that fly upward, — were they meant to accentuate a natural effect of the perspective, to add height to height? These edifices rising in separate terraces, these seven-storied golden thrones — the seven Buddhist paradises — each on its couch of water and lotus, — were they brought from Babylon, the mother of architecture, which gave us the arch and those *ziggarats* or astronomical towers that served as the model for so many Indian temples?

The interior of the Palace — where the King lives rarely — is decorated in a style reflecting the

early Victorian notion of the Orient, and is furnished with dismal couches set in a row and separated by betel spittoons. However, there is one room, the former throne room, that is worth seeing. The sovereign still holds audiences in it. The room is cut in two by a curtain of gold which, when pulled back, reveals the golden throne of the King, like that of the kings of Ayuthia. Everywhere there is too much gold, as in the Indian legends. It is like an Asiatic stylization of a high skiff seen alongside about six feet above the ground. Seven rows of sacred figurines, each poised on decorative motives taken from the lotus and other water plants, raise it up to a pavillion where the King sits in state, — a central figure always in a frame, as in the paintings of the great masters. The monarch is surrounded by circular parasols of cloth of gold nine stories high, nine being a mystic number sacred to Buddha and to kings. It is thus that the King must have been seen by the Chevalier de Chaumont, ambassador from Louis XIV, in the course of his first extraordinary audience when the unusual height of the royal throne threatened to upset everything.

Asiatic etiquette forbids kings to receive the letters of other kings from the hand of an ambassador. Therefore they are never seated within reach

of envoys. But M. de Chaumont, faithful to the French tradition which considers that an envoy extraordinary is the incarnation of the person of his sovereign, refused to surrender his credentials. Actually, the throne was too high to permit him to hand his autographed missive to the king of Siam, even if it had been allowed. The Siamese prime minister, Constance (an amazing Greek adventurer from Cephalonia, named Phaulkon, proposed to send up the letter on the end of a stick. M. de Chaumont refused and requested simply that the throne be lowered, with that prodigious insolence which was to remain unmatched, except by English diplomatists two hundred years later. It was also proposed to hoist the envoy of the King of France up on a platform. Finally, on the day of audience, the King appeared on his throne at that kind of window six feet up. "The ambassador," says Choisy, "put his letter into a gold cup and presented it to the king, but without effort, without so much as raising his elbow, as if the King had been as low as he. M. Constance, who was crouching on the floor behind, cried to the ambassador: 'Lift it! lift it!' But Chaumont would not stir, and the good King was obliged to bend half way down out of his window to take the letter." And Father Tachard, another witness,

adds: "Then the King placed the letter from Louis XIV upon his head, which is an extraordinary mark of honor and esteem."

The farther one penetrates towards the centre of the royal enclosure, the more do the monuments, steles, and mausoleums crowd and jostle one another, choking up the courts with their golden abundance and their religious luxuriance. The central reliquary, a golden cone carved in great flanges, a giant spiral standing in the implacable noon day sun, makes me feel for a moment that it is one of the gilded cupolas of the Kremlin. I can still see from the dark interior of an exquisite pagoda whose painted frescoes are eaten up by the humidity, the blinding brilliance of this mass of gold shining in the sky through the wide open doorway. Farther away, two giants are guarding a sanctuary, great clubs between their knees, and wearing, like sacred dancers, frightening masks. The terror inspired by their immobile faces is dissipated by their sentinel-like stolidity and their uniforms, made of some harmless, sparkling material. The polished marble is like a skating rink and burns one's eyes. Later we pass the Mint, and the Royal Library in whose shade gleam those rare lacquer cabinets of which specimens were

brought to the Musée Cernuschi in 1924 and 1925 through the efforts of M. Pila and presented to the city of Paris. They are filled with sacred texts, prints, Pali writing on fan-palm leaves, and inscriptions in stone from Ligor and Korat, among others. The Pagoda of the Great Bones is, as its name indicates, a cheerful mausoleum of porcelain, hardened bouquets and flowered mosaics which are duplicated only — and even then differently — in the Mussulman art of Persia and Morocco. This is the depository of the golden urns in which repose the bones and the ashes of the kings, only the flesh being burned as perishable, the skeletons preserved for use in adventures to come.

The *Prakeo Wat*, or temple royal, the most overornamented of all the temples of Bangkok, has no priests. But it has been embellished by all the sovereigns for a century past. In a flagged and private court stands a golden sentry-box, glistening like a gown, where the King, seated in god-like fashion, appears once a year to his great feudal lords of Shan and Lao in the north. Swords of incrusted mirrors bring an artificial light into this niche and elevate it.

Inside, I saw the famous emerald Buddha rest-

ing on an altar of crystal and gold. In the dark temple — whose only light comes through the open mother-of-pearl doors — further darkened by rather theatrically painted frescoes on a bituminous background, it gleams of a sudden in the light of electric lights hanging high in space directly above it. It is not of emerald but of jasper, and is clothed like a madonna. Tapers and offerings surround it. Behind the altar is the property-room and dressing-room, for this Buddha changes his garb with the seasons. The hair-nets of gold, the strings of pearl, and the collections of rings are all laid out here in preparation for the next season. Buddhas should be seen from below and at a three-quarters angle. In the foreshortening of the shoulder, the swelling contour of the cheek, and the flight of the eye towards the temple, there is a beauty unmatched in any western image. When the eye-lid is half closed above the gleam of a leaf of gold or a layer of white enamel, or as in this Buddha a diamond placed to catch the light, one is held irresistibly by this glowing meditation, tranquilly wise and inwardly burning. Motionless since the installation of the lights, has the emerald Buddha forgotten his earlier mishaps? From the fifteenth century onward he was hidden, buried, stolen, torn from his temples; he has known sacked towns and flights

abroad, finally to return to Bangkok in a triumphal procession.

The handsomest temples to be found outside the royal enclosure are the *Po Wat* and the *Cheng Wat*. The first of these is the sanctuary of meditation and solitude. It is to be visited when the strength of the sun is on the decline and before the sudden fall of the tropical night. The *Po Wat* is a pool of religious repose in the very heart of the city. The fig-trees darken it with their sacred umbrage. A stone *linga*, the relic of Brahmin superstition tolerated by Buddhism, rears its monstrous and encouraging tumescence in the sight of sterile women. Within the temple, beyond the gold-lacquered doors and windows whose rich materials contrast so entirely with the white lime which is the only decoration of the walls, rests the great couched Buddha, one of the marvels of southern Asia. At first one is surrounded by darkness. Then the priest opens a window, and a shapeless mass looking much like a dead elephant appears. Another open window — this time at the far end of the hall — and suddenly the mass lengthens, stretches like the hallucination of hashish. Finally the outlines of the reclining god dawn upon the mind. This way did the Perfect One dispose him-

self when he understood that the time had come for his death. A man could run over him, scale his shoulders, without weighing more than a fly or disturbing his slumber. His beauty is such that the supernatural proportions cannot diminish it. Immense, brought down by the tempest of life, he lies with his eyes closed, his head in one hand, his limbs composed, in a monumental state of abandon.

At the other extremity — and you want much time and many steps to make the tour of this slumbering Buddha — the feet present themselves to the adoration of the faithful, soldered, soles joined, rosy with incrustations of mother-of-pearl. Everywhere in Asia the feet of the Master are worshipped, — as also the hand of Fatima and the foot of Mohammed. In Ceylon and in India a number of imprints of the Sacred Feet are places of pilgrimage. The first imprint was discovered at Sankisa, one hundred fifty miles north of Benares. It was there that Buddha stood after three months of absence in the paradise of Indra. In the middle of the foot is the sacred wheel, the Wheel of the law, the mysterious circle of cause and effect. The stiff fingers, summarily sculptured, are covered with spirals in the same pattern as that covering the skin. I went back to the head before leaving and

stood under the chin where I could gaze over all the vast landscape of the divine body, prolonged by the parallel of the disappearing legs. I had an impression of eternal rest, the final recovery in the midst of illness, far from pain, of that health which is death.

The *Cheng Wat* is on the other side of the river, on the right bank of the Me-Nam. If it had been built beside the water, beautiful vertical effects might have been secured by the reflection; the stake might have been doubled. The Burmese and the Venetians knew how to make use of the water for the glory of their monuments, clear masses resting on scarcely darker images. But the Siamese appear to have neglected this easy alliance and have built their temples a little off the water's edge. The reliquaries of this temple, adorned with flowers, fruits, demons, and gods held up by three elephants in the form of a star, are the most beautiful of all. Tropical architecture, with its floral excesses beside which the guide-book imaginations are chaste, is at its height here. A lofty pointed column tops the storied pyramid that dominates Bangkok. It makes no difference that on coming nearer we see the tawdriness of the materials, the broken porcelain and even the Strasbourg plates that went to its making. Absorbed into and coagu-

lated with the cement, these materials form a luminous paste, cool, original, reminiscent of the boldest attempts made by the modern schools to use new materials. From the top platform all Bangkok can be seen, grouped about its two-elbowed river, — the old city with its ancient Portuguese fortifications, its dead gardens, its ramified canals and multi-surfaced roofs, unfolded like a road map.

My memory goes back again to so many less famous temples, abandoned in the environs or in the woods. Buried among the mangroves, sought and rarely found through a thousand canals, you reach them of a sudden without knowing it, and it is only the gleam of yellow robes that reveals them. In the courts filled with oozing mud, as if the river had suddenly withdrawn, are monstrous banyans. They have burst through the marble benches which surrounded them, like a man breathing so deeply that he bursts through his belt. First a fissure, then a crack, finally an abyss and the benches gave way. Altars of marble weighing a ton have been lifted by the banyan roots and remain hanging. There reigns a forest calm that is reserved for the wise; but as in the Buddhist writings, it remains a forest from which a town can be seen. Thinking doubtless of the time when they worshipped trees, the Siamese have refused to uproot them. A little

distance from the Legation is the house of a French missionary which is slowly being crushed by a great tree, while nobody will agree to attack the encroaching vegetal majesty. A place of silence. No sound of klaxons here. Bats fly noiselessly as in a vacuum. The mirror of the river is a magic looking-glass in which the absent appear. With my feet on the marquetrie of shade and sunlight I wait among the black pigs and the prayers. A little boy, who is later to fan me with a punkah, comes to tell me that the abbot is expecting me for tea. The monks eat only once or twice a day. They leave to go begging at dawn, and walk through the city with their begging bowls hung from the neck or clasped in both hands against the belly. They stop in meditation before a house and wait without speaking. Those who live in the house come out and fill the bowls with rice, only too happy to acquire merit in this way. Then, without ever a word of thanks, the priests return to the temple and eat. In the afternoon they leave again, still mute, carrying a great umbrella and an old lady's basket under the arm. Yellower than our tramcars, these mendicant saints, in boats or in the streets, form admirably draped groups in masses of color which, according to the usage of the robe and the number of washings it has undergone, varies from gold-

button to straw, from nasturtium to egg, from the tarnished yellow of wax to the lively crome of the canary. Yellow was the color of the Indian pariahs, and Buddha exchanged his princely garb for a yellow robe. Priests are recruited at their own volition; they do not take eternal vows. They have no possessions, or, more exactly, they have the right to possess eight objects: three robes, a bowl, a razor, needles, a filter, and a sash. Sometimes they are allowed in addition a fan so that "the age" may not offend their sight. Both head and eyebrows are shaved blue.

His religion demands that every Siamese retire into retreat in a monastery for several months. This is a sort of obligatory ecclesiastical service. He is accompanied by his relatives in great pomp. Tea is drunk. The betel and the pink lime are sent round. The novice is splendidly attired in white, as was Buddha. Then his begging bowl is hung from his neck, he is asked if he is suffering from a contagious disease, or is in debt, and finally he is clothed in the yellow robe. He takes a vow not to destroy human or animal life, not to steal, lie, drink, dance, sing, gamble, wear ornaments, use perfume, and he agrees to remain chaste, to have a wide high bed, and not to touch money. It is forbidden him to inhale the aroma of flowers, to sit with legs

outstretched, to burn wood, to trade, to preserve the remains of his food, to whistle, to wreath his head with flowers, or to prefer one man to another. His duty is to meditate in accordance with Buddhist law, that is to say, chiefly upon the ills of the world; to despise human pleasures, vanity, and impurity. These tasks seem easy. Whereas our Catholic priests find themselves excluded from the society of men by the existence they lead and because of their virtues, these Buddhist monks seem to live on a level with the lay world without any particular asceticism, so simple are the customs of the tropics, so widely is their wealth distributed among all, so few are their needs, and so summary their social or sexual manifestations.

Siamese Festivals

Ceremonies are not well suited to democracies. Costly pomp and pagentry belong to absolute institutions. Authoritarian Moscow, with its taste for public spectacles, is no exception to the rule. We owe to Moscow the resumption at Canton of those processions which the modest Chinese Republic had everywhere suppressed. Siam has retained the decorative sense of diversion, the secret of popular celebrations and royal formalities. Not the Masonic and Ku-Klux cavalcades of America, with all Broadway dressed as knights or musketeers, nor the wretched historical masquerades known in England as pagents; nor the propaganda processions of Soviet Russia, the flower floats got up for tourists on the Riviera, the Flemish kermesses, — these ancient pleasures of peoples who know no longer how to amuse themselves, — can approach the Siamese cycles of feast days which are at once religious, sporting, and theatrical, and are an impulsive manifestation of the joy of living, the privilege of the last nation where the morning after remains gay.

The most beautiful of these festivals are the Court ceremonies. They take place on the occasion of a funeral, a coronation, a tonsuring, a marriage, and — an occasion which has now been abandoned — an elephant hunt or the consecration of a white elephant. The other observances are those of the new year, the farming seasons, and the royal visits to the temples. They are periodic and less important.

Except the criminals and the paupers, the Siamese are cremated after death. Suicides and victims of cholera suffer the treatment we accord ourselves: they are ignominiously buried. The royal cremations take place out of doors on the great green called *Pramen* before the Palace, from which one has such a beautiful view of the enclosure and the towers. The body is placed under a canopy of gold cloth, surrounded by gold parasols. It is seated in an urn. This custom, which is also observable in Borneo and in Java, is a ritualistic return to the position of the foetus. If the body is that of the king, it wears a gold mask. For some weeks in advance, the corpse has been given mercury and honey to drink. All the discharge that has not been burned by the mercury descends into a false bottom of the urn and is reverently collected and thrown into the river. In certain countries this

corpse juice is drunk, for it contains the virtues of the deceased. Then comes the cremation proper. The urn is placed on choice woods, surrounded by soldiers, magicians, and Brahmins. As in China, white is the color of mourning, although black, so much less beautiful, is coming to be allowed. The defunct King is exposed for seven days amid prayers and games. There are fireworks, the burning of allegorical animals, shadow plays, marionette shows, and theatrical performances. These curious diversions, so characteristic of Siam, seem to confirm the recent theories of those who maintain that the origin of the theatre is not Dionysiac but funereal. On the seventh day the pyre is finally lighted, everybody bringing up his torch. These ceremonies are exceedingly costly and are sometimes deferred for lack of ready money. Meanwhile, the corpse, crouching in its urn, awaits better times.

Ordinary funerals are simpler. In order to baffle the soul, that restive animal which, realizing that it is to be taken away with the body, might refuse to follow it and remain to haunt the house, a breach is made in the wall through which the coffin is carried noiselessly out. Once outside, and before being taken to the crematory, it is zigzagged all about the town in order to throw the

evil spirits off the track. In olden days there was a municipal trumpet band at Bangkok whose duty it was to blow their flourish into the still warm corpse in order to drive away the demons that try to enter it so that they may become reincarnated with it.

There are many ceremonies of magic and other rituals of Brahmin origin. That of the plow, for instance, the first furrow of the year driven by the minister of agriculture. The most curious of these is the ceremony of the swing in which men try to catch a sack of silver in their teeth. And there is the ceremony of the *Kathin* when the King goes, either by land or in an ancient canoe, to the temples.

White Elephants

The Siamese wonder why the word Siam is associated in the minds of Europeans only with Siamese cats, which do not exist in their country, or Bangkok hats, of which there are none in Bangkok, or the Siamese twins, whose identity is a mystery to them. As for the white elephants, which we also imagine to be a local specialty, they used formerly to exist, but their worship has become simplified, attenuated, and tends now to disappear. This worship struck Louis XIV's envoys most forcibly and through them the memory of it has persisted in the West. "We have shipped off three young elephants," wrote La Loubère, "which the King of Siam is sending to their royal highnesses the grandsons of France. The Siamese who brought them on board our vessels took leave of them as of three friends, and speaking into their ears (!) said: 'Go, go with joy. You will really be slaves, but you will be the slaves of three of the greatest princes of the earth, whose service is as sweet as it is glorious.'" Revered in Cambodia and in Burma, elsewhere the white elephant is merely

a pink albino. Among the Hinduists who consider Buddha a solar myth, the white elephant symbolizes a cloud. It was formerly a totemic animal and its rare color conferred upon it, until recent years, sovereign power. White is the synonym of serenity and nobility among all the colored peoples, — or was until the Whites appeared to prove the contrary. When Buddha had to undergo transformations into animal shapes he chose white animals; — the swan, the swallow, the monkey, and the elephant are still sacred because the soul of a king has inhabited them.

All elephants belong as of right to the Crown. They come down into the fields, destroy everything, and tear up telegraph poles because — it is said poetically — the hum of the wires is like that of bees in their ears and makes them hopeful of finding honey.

As soon as the governor of a province was apprised of the capture of a white elephant he would notify the Court, and prayers would be offered up in all the temples. The King would dispatch an expedition to bring the prisoner to Bangkok with great pomp. A messenger, sent down from the north, would announce to the King the sex, age, and size of the sacred animal, giving all possible details. Such happy news meriting its recompense,

the King would have the messenger's mouth filled with gold, as well as his ears, nostrils, and every other natural orifice.

Escorted by singers, dancers, musicians, and acrobats, the elephant would be brought down from the jungle to the river. There a raft awaited him, carrying a gold canopy and enclosed in scarlet curtains. The floor of the raft was covered with flowers. The elephant was put on a mattress of gold cloth and bathed and perfumed with great ceremony. He had the right to jessamine perfumed beverages, sweets made of cocoanut and sugar cane, and rice cakes served up in flat dishes. Thus he would float down to the environs of Bangkok where, if he were not already dead of indigestion, the King would come in person to fetch him to his stall. Followed by all the nobles, the elephant would enter his capital surrounded by the altars of repose which were covered with offerings. He would meanwhile have been transferred from his raft to a gilded bark with ropes of spider thread. The cannon of the fortress boomed a salute as he entered. Gifts and slaves were offered him at the palace. The court jeweler took his measure and made diadems and gold chains for him. When he went out his head was covered with a parasol. When he died the country went into mourning.

His heart and brain were cremated, and a posthumus title of nobility was conferred upon him.

The elephant hunt which took place at Ayuthia just before the war restored to this deserted city, for a few days, its aspect of old. All the captured elephants were collected in a barbaric kraal made of enormous piles. Then they were led to the bath. These thick Asiatic hordes, driven as by a forest fire, entering *en masse* into the water with their trunks in the air, formed a sight worthy of the khanats of the Oxus. This was the last remnant of those twenty thousand war elephants that Tachard, the Jesuit, still saw in Siam in the seventeenth century.

Games

Games, which are held in such high honor in Siam, form part of those Oceanic customs that are perhaps the last reminiscence on earth of a terrestrial paradise. In Java, in Malaysia, in Borneo, and in the Philippines we still find the Polynesian taste for music, flowers, swimming, animal combats, kite-flying, shadow theatres, and football games. Siamese football, called *takro*, is played without the use of the hands, like soccer. The players send the ball forward with their heads or backward with their feet, and their agility is breath-taking. There are times when the ball never touches the ground at all. The kite-flying takes place principally in March, on the green before the Palace. People lie on their backs, the better to see; there are aerial combats, and of course there is betting. The hunting kite is large and armed with bamboo. The defense kite is small and diamond-shaped. The two are skilfully manipulated to seek or avoid one another and astounding dodgings are performed. As soon as the large kite is touched it falls. Cock-fighting has gone out of

fashion, even at Manila. Great fights between wild beasts are no longer to be seen. Quail duels, in which each seeks to tear out the other's tongue, are foresters' pleasures. Combats of crickets that have been stimulated by aphrodisiacs are Chinese. But there is one sport of which I am very fond: it is fish-fighting. The Siamese fighting fish, the *plakat*, is as thick as a finger and of a neutral color. The champions lie in glass globes, with sheets of cardboard between. As soon as the cardboard is raised the fish see one another, bristle, quiver, tremble, and change color marvelously. Their fins take on the enamel blue of Brazilian butterflies and their bodies become purple. They commence to vibrate and to dash themselves against the glass, nose to nose. When they are put into the same globe they tear and destroy one another. The fish merchant, wishing to keep them intact, slips the cardboard once more between them. Instantly, the other being out of sight, each fish forgets his hatred, his beautiful colors fade, and he becomes tranquil once more. Champions are worth up to one thousand francs each and are nourished on mosquito eggs.

Some Customs of the Country

The Siamese greet one another charmingly, their hands joined in prayer and their bodies bent at the waist. When inferiors come into the presence of their superiors they prostrate themselves and advance by crawling on their knees. It is satisfying to be treated thus in a country where there is no employment bureau to complain of a shortage of servants, and to be able to say with a seventeenth century traveler: "No magnificence strikes one so much as a great multitude of men whose duty is to serve one." When Queen Victoria received a Siamese embassy at Windsor she was frightened to see these hunters on her trail crawling in her direction. Sometimes, to indicate even greater respect, the hands are joined very gracefully above the head. The head is sacred in Siam. One of the reasons why there are no multiple stories in Siamese houses is that it is not proper to walk over the heads of others.

The Siamese think that the body is a composite of water, air, earth, and fire, and that illness comes only of an excess or a diminution of these elements.

They believe in ghosts, in *Phi*. These spirits and many others play a great rôle in their lives. They are the spectres of those who have died of cholera or have been eaten by wild beasts, or have had no sepulchre. It is curious that the word *phi* and the thing it represents correspond closely to the *piaye* or ghosts of the natives of the Antilles. They must be looked after and fed. I had a chauffeur who was a good fellow except when he was pursued by his familiar demon; then he would run off and disappear. The most dangerous of all are the ghosts of women who have died in childbirth and of those who loved life too well while they lived. They are particular objects of fear to young people. Witch doctors have to be consulted in order to ward them off, and the witches ask big fees. Music, baths, and charms are employed for protection, but one of the best shields is the tattooing of admirably designed magical letters in blue ink, quite pale and characterized by dots and cabalistic strokes. Precious stones also are a remedy, while metals are a sure cure. For example, a little silver may be slipped under the skin. Many of the Siamese soldiers who paraded about the Arc de Triomphe in Paris in 1919 were sewn with silver. The children wear a belt of phallic symbols in silver about the waist. People in Siam still remember the English-

woman who bought one of these sexual belts and wore it about her neck.

The Siamese women formerly went bare-breasted, and in the hinterland this may still be seen occasionally. Now they wear wrapped about their bodies a scarf known as the *pahom*. Their breasts are rarely beautiful. Their hair is close-cropped and brush-like; this is not a concession to fashion but on the contrary an ancient custom, a sign of independence from the Cambodians. It is said that once, when the Cambodians had laid long siege to Ayuthia, they advanced under the ramparts in the conviction that they had killed off the entire garrison and could easily take the city. To their amazement they saw a great number of male heads peering over the walls, and they retreated. These were the heads of the women who had cut their hair in order to deceive the enemy. Before this time the Siamese women wore top-knots, and it is this that explains the high conic bonnets seen at Angkor and still worn by the dancers. There was a time when long hair and white teeth were in bad taste and sufficed to make social pariahs of their possessors. But the cinema, — that great leveller of manners, — has changed all this. Ladies of quality now dress in European fashion, although formerly they, like the men, wore the

panung, that length of cotton or of silk that hangs down to the calves in front and is caught up behind, forming a kind of Turkish trousers. They used to have a different color *panung* for each day of the week. The Siamese are wonderfully familiar with the art of draping and folding: never a pin, never a sash; their clothes are tied in magical knots.

They are a polygamous people, — or at least polygamy is practised in the highest circles. The reason for their polygamy is to increase the number of their children, — an ideal rather different to ours. The ancient kings had thousands of children. But there is always a first wife, and only marriage with her is the object of ceremony. The concubines (a word to which they attach no opprobrium) are often dancers, and are sometimes selected for the king's service by the queen herself. Since they are never rich, their trousseau consists usually in a Buddha and a betel box. "When the Siamese speak of women," writes La Loubère, "they add the word *young* as if women could never age." The typical Siamese woman is heavy and Polynesian. Often at the theatre I have thought, looking at their coarse black hair, their burning eyes, their flat, polished faces lighted up by flowers, that I was looking at Gauguins. There is certainly an Oceanic race here in Siam, far as it is

from the southern seas. Perhaps it is the last remnant of a Caucasian migration which, after cross-breeding with the Mongoloid elements of Tibet, has swarmed down through the Pacific.

The children are charming and go naked, their little bellies filled to bursting with rice. Sometimes they smoke cigars, stopping only long enough to suckle their mothers.

Siamese Art

Siam must not be confused with Cambodia, and an exchange mistaken for an identity. It is true that Angkor was the great source of inspiration of the conquering Siamese, who destroyed it only to see it born again in their own soil. Both have the same taste for gold, jewelry, heavy stuffs themselves a kind of jewelry, a theatre as rich and incoherent as nature, and the same ornamental worship of the serpent, — that brother of the Chinese dragon and the Apocalyptic Beast, storied, rounded, uncoiled, or erect, — as well as the same adaptation of holy places, into pleasure grounds, and palaces. The same gentle customs under the same climate. But in Siam the Khmer art was softened, filtered, and enriched by graceful contributions from Burma. Deprived of the rust-colored, ferruginous sandstone of Angkor, it accommodated itself to brick, stucco, and more deceitful materials.

All we know in France of Siamese art is its lacquer cabinets and Buddhas, but there are other riches. I have said something of the skill with

which they treated glass and porcelain mosaics. The lacquers, for which the Chinese technique has been adopted, with or without incrustations of mother-of-pearl, are beautiful for their rich foliage, their panels decorated in the center with human figures in solid gold, and their flames or tongues of fire, symbols of the *Trimourti*, or Brahmin trinity. The black and red lacquers come from the North; those of Xieng Mai are famous. Their weapons smack of Indian influence and are covered with nielloes in obscure patterns set in pewter, sulphur, and antimony, like those handsome Siamese cannon of nielloed silver presented to Louis XIV. The chiseled and embossed silverwork is no better than the horrible average of Indo-Malaysian work. The jewelry is made of pure or nearly pure red gold of a beautiful warm color and is skilfully chased. There was a time when every dancing girl wore five pounds of such jewelry on her person. Siamese painting is poor. The climate wears it rapidly away, so that frescoes, in the tropics, hardly last fifty years. Chinese competition has prevented the development of Siamese porcelain work, despite a number of delicately designed models; but the fashion has come in of collecting the ancient porcelains of Ayuthia, and even the much earlier ones of Sawanalok. The pottery baked

for Siam in China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and decorated in Siam is distinguished by fruit and flame motifs and the heavy use of gold. Among the bronzes the ancient drums used in the Shan wars, decorated with frogs, are sober and barbaric in their beauty and are now copied in China and Japan.

The Wings of the Siamese Theatre

I went one day to spend a morning at the Royal Ministry of Entertainments. Within the precincts of the royal city whose walls are topped by lanceolated battlements, in the peaceful gardens, we were shown what might be at once a conservatory of music, the wardrobe of a subsidized theatre, and the green-room of a *corps de ballet*. Great halls filled with properties opened their treasures. All these masks, chariots, strange trappings seen hitherto at a distance in the magic of processions or performances, became mine in the flat light of a rainy morning. Ranged in perfect order in a series of glass cases I saw masks of deities, and of animals, grotesque, pierced with blind eyes, the masks which the dancing girls hold by a string caught between their teeth. Here was the livid face of Hanuman, the brave, astute, very generous general of the monkeys, the green face of Rama, the black head of Ngo, the ugly man. There were dancing costumes in gold and silver cloth, admirable red scarves that float crosswise over the shoul-

ders and brighten the gold; stoles, *cache-sexe*, thigh-pieces, false finger-nails, leggins, all the sections of those gold carapaces which leave bare only the face and feet of the actor, effecting thus a marvelous contrast. Europeans are too prone to believe that these Asiatic dances are lascivious. As a matter of fact, Asia is chaste; it dissembles the wealth of its body as it does its other wealth. M. Groslier, our greatest authority on Cambodia,[1] tells me that he tried once to arrange a reconstruction of the dances shown in the low reliefs at Angkor, whose dancers are bare-breasted. He was obliged to abandon this interesting attempt for want of dancing girls who would agree to expose their breasts.

My guilty taste for theatre jewelry was excited by coiled serpents, diadems of paste, tiaras of gold and silver, conical bonnets the brilliance of whose precious metals was heightened by inlaid mirrors. Nothing could tear me away from the pandemonium of stage properties: silver bows and arrows worthy of opera kings, panlanquins in which

[1] With his name I should like to associate that of M. Coedès of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, a specialist of renown in Siamese art and literature, as well as the name of M. René Nicolas, professor in the School of Pages at Bangkok, who speaks with unique competence on the Siamese theatre and is preparing an exhaustive study of this subject.

princes appear after they have been disguised as mice or crocodiles and are ready to take on human form again, wide-petalled lotuses that serve as lifts in which the king of the monkeys goes down to Hell, and chariots that figure in the apotheoses of chosen shepherds.

The Siamese are, with the Burmese, the Javanese, and the Cambodians, the most musical people in Asia. Many nobles have their own orchestra just as they had, until the recent advent of the high cost of living, their own troupe of actors. There are no written scores; the music is traditional and is learned by ear. I could see the instruments laid out in a silent orchestra: the Chinese two-stringed violins, the three-stringed violins, the gongs, the drums shaped like sonorous barrels, and the magnificent, boat-shaped xylophones, — boats whose bridge is a keyboard, — inlaid with mother-of-pearl; and also the guitars which rest on the ground when played, the strings being stopped with steel fingers, as in Hawaii. But the prettiest instrument of all is the *khong-long*, a circle of cymbals. The player crouches in the center and flagellates himself, striking with wooden hammers on every side of his sonorous crinoline.

The great plays are very beautiful but incredibly

long. They are scenes taken from the Ramayana illustrating heroic episodes, epic poems of Indian and Javanese origin telling of the loves of gods and princesses and presenting an ensemble of lyrical and dramatic mimesis. The actors employ plastic poses or retarded dance movements. They speak rarely, and sing little and badly. In the wings, and sometimes on stage in the place of the ancient chorus, a group of singers intone a sort of plain chant that accompanies the action. Everything proceedes unfalteringly in the grand manner. In some plays a curious sort of Oriental *commedia dell'arte* is introduced: Siamese buffoons, seated in the foreground, comment extemporaneously on the play and make the audience laugh.

The chief point of interest about the Siamese theatre is that it is the last surviving form of a great Indian dramatic tradition that seems to have disappeared everywhere else. It is generally acknowledged that despite the intelligent protection accorded Cambodian art by the French authorities, the royal troupe of Pnom Penh is degenerating; where formerly the actors and actresses were willingly offered to the King by their families and villages, they are no longer sent freely to the Palace. At Bangkok, mainly because the late monarch adored the theatre and acted himself,

translated Shakespeare, and wrote his own plays, the theatre has retained something of its traditional brilliance. But even here there will soon be left only those shabby companies, devoid of taste for their art, garbed in seedy costumes, who play evenings in the temples during certain ceremonies of cremation. The decadence of public taste is parallel to that in the theatre, and all the young Siamese prefer Fairbanks to Rama.

At the Opera

A pretty princess in a carapace of red gold stood poised on rhythms variously sharp and gentle but always retarded. She was an innocent victim answering to the name of Kaki, and tradition obliged her, in the course of her loves, to pass through a great many hands. She was fished up by fishermen, captured by bandits, ravished by animals, coveted by kings, and loved by princes. This docile prey of the Orient allowed herself to be possessed by everybody without betraying the slightest surprise. I remember the moment when the bird bestrode by Vishnu, the Garuda, holding in its beak the bowl that renders it invisible, appeared in the air in a magnificent red costume. On our stage, the bird costumes are always ridiculous. This great stiff-winged hawk was frightening and sublime under its white mask and curved beak. It was hiding a prince who was in love with the princess. Coming down from the sky, the bird danced a dance of seduction. Then it returned, carrying on its back another young prince who, in order to conceal himself in its feathers, had been

transformed into a louse. A golden throne was shown on the carelessly painted back-drop. The stage hands came on and changed the set while the action continued. Some idea of the monotony of the opera may be had when I say that the elaboration of the love theme took no less than four hours. At one moment the prince, seated beside his beloved, tries to take her into his arms. She wards him off with a very slow, very chaste, exquisite gesture. This gesture was repeated eighty-three times! Each movement, actually, is regulated by ritual and corresponds exactly to a theme.

The *La-Khon*, or legendary histories, go on for several days. In addition there are mythological farces, open-air fair shows, and shadow plays, for the Siamese theatre is varied. There is also a kind of modern operetta that reminds one of the Spanish *zarzuela*, in which foreign influence is dominant. These companies are composed only of women, who play the rôles of men as well as their own and are without any hint of stage sense. Asiatic actors appear to be completely bewildered as soon as they step out of the traditional rôles and attitudes which they have to learn by heart. The chorus in the wings repeats the lines of the actors in a singular, monotonous, and charming echo. The actresses, their cheeks covered with paint as hard as

baked porcelain, wear collars of natural flowers that are soft and cool to the touch. When the spectators decide that one or another of them has acted well they send her notes of five or ten ticals (sixty or one hundred twenty francs), which she keeps pinned to these collars until the end of the play.

An Evening of Siamese Dances

The great tradition is vanishing. One by one the private troupes are disintegrating. Most of the dancers at the Palace are amateurs. King Rama VI was particularly interested in male dancers. The pupils are rejecting the stern discipline. The dancing masters are dying off. Prince Damrong, uncle of the king and a typical old-fashioned Asiatic gentleman of the highest class, very urbane and jealous of the great traditions, wishing me to take back to Europe a true impression of the old school of Siamese dancing, arranged an evening of perfect artistry which has remained intact in my memory. I was told that the kings of Cambodia now have to call upon the Siamese to educate their dancers and that I should not see elsewhere what I was to be shown this evening.

In the foreground an orchestra of some fifteen musicians crouched or sat on the floor. Beyond were verandahs open on the night, shafts of lightning, and torrents of water that brought no coolness in the air. Two screens on each side of the stage. As if emerging from the last of their leaves, two pyramids of red gold came forward to the

sound of the music. On the right was a man; on the left a woman. Faces flat, motionless, moon-struck. Bare feet and hands covered with zinc ointment over a layer of saffron stain. A little carmined Chinese rose, bold and arbitrary, on the cheeks. Costumes of warm gold without clasps, sewn on the body, out of which the nudity leapt astonishingly. On the head a conic tiara of gold pads lying flat on the forehead and rolling over each temple. The torso closely wound round, as in certain of our evening gowns; then, as a concession to free movement, puffed pantaloons of cloth of gold, low over the haunches. Side by side the two actresses (one playing the part of the man) come forward for the ritualistic salute, prostrate themselves, offering up their cup-shaped hands. They dance side by side, or facing one another, or back to back in a retarded rhythm like nothing we know in Europe, and their art is a succession of plastic poses melting into one another by changes of posture whose equilibrium is profoundly studied. None of the Western vulgarity of smiles, flutterings, loss of balance, and winks towards the stage boxes. Flexing of the thighs, splits, diagonal crossing of the feet; naked, exquisite feet marking the beat flatly, showing now the heel and now the toe, put down on the ground with more precaution than on a sheet of burning metal. A sort of

lyrical goose-step, an immobile race, the laborious advance of a diver through dense territory. Like ripples on the face of the water is the flowing movement that animates the gestures of the arms beginning at the shoulder, breaking the line of the elbow, fluttering the hand, and undulating visibly through the whole of the body down to the toes. The fingers too play their part, spread out and bent backward until they touch the wrist; white fingers, curved out like jessamine petals, lying like a spider on the hip, and forming that unique gesture in which the dancer indicates that she is about to pluck out her heart between two nails.

Striking and blowing, the musicians are noisy and tireless. A drum (drums must always be beaten with the hand, for this gives a personal and characteristic quality to each sound) is like a barrel running with liquid harmony. There comes the harrassing intercession of a single air which each instrument takes up in turn when another has finished it.

And the poses continue without ever an emphatic expression on these immobile faces. At the antipodes from the primitive negro art of New York, so modern in its electric vibration, are these white immobile faces. Dressed like Indian statues, wearing Siva's own skirt, these are veritable *Asparas*, sisters of the low reliefs of Angkor.

Ayuthia

The tropical races are as simple in death as in life and readily accept their noiseless passage to other existences. The bodies are cremated, the wood of which their houses are built is rotted and worm-eaten; the vegetation unseals ruins; the civilizations discreetly efface their own tracks and go their way. Ayuthia has crumbled into powder. The heavy masses of brick, the fearful, uncemented arches surcharged with Hindu decoration, crumble in the soft moisture; as for the pinnacles, they were so light that they were the first to fly. The Burmese burned the pagodas, broke up the Buddhas in their search for treasure, and these Buddhas, mutilated, decapitated, entangled in the creepers, still lie here, defended against the collector by the inextricable jungle and the hordes of giant red ants. The reliquaries buried under the vegetation have become the primitive hillocks of which they were formerly only the expression. All that remains is the great ancient *Sucorakot Wat* where the colossal bronze Buddha, like a divine sentinel standing in the breach, is the last

witness to the three hundred pagodas which have been swallowed up by the forest. Founded in 1350 by the Thai, the free men from the North who fled in the path of Kubla Khán's invasion, and destroyed by the Burmese in 1766, Ayuthia has decomposed like meat. Desolation is now the eternal inhabitant of the City of the Angels, whose least pretentious Oriental sub-titles were, — gradually as the city became more and more fragile, — Golden City, Mansion of the Gods, the Holy City, the Impregnable, and the Refuge of the World.

Farewell to Bangkok

The implacable noon-day October sun tries to blind you, like a mischievous child with a bit of looking glass. Blue mats afford poor covering and protection to the bodies lying on the bare deck, drunken with light. In this somnolent world only the Chinese are up and selling. The slender cocoanut trees bend like bridges over the water. The Legation is disappearing; only for one moment do I see the tip of the banyan that stood to the right and was mine. Already its harsh, handsome trunk, that rears like a column above a knot of snakes, has disappeared. When I came here I had some hope of staying, of looking on, finally, at the goings and comings of others than myself. . . .

The thermometer drops vertiginously two degrees. Here is the sea, the Opal Sea that joins Siam to Cambodia, the sea in which Camoëns went down. There is in his Lusiads a little evocation of Siam that was later to be remembered by Childe Harold:

See where the Me-Nam pours its noble flood . . .

It was on this obscure blue coast, the blue of shadows and of fermented waters, that he was wrecked

and swam to the rock with one arm out of the water, saving his manuscript like a proper man of letters.

Topped by a fleece of woolly smoke, a Danish steamer takes us towards Re-Am, the new port of Cambodia. The signal pennants come down out of the sky, the plumb line is drawn up from the water: these maritime attributes meet on the bridge at my feet.

When I raise my eyes Siam has vanished.

Fever in Cambodia

You pull 'em curtains. You close 'em shutters."

There is still a pool of light, a blade of sunshine. And yet one cannot pull sheets that are as hot as fur over one's head. Now everything is shut, but nothing is dark. It is as if, in the active combustion of noon, the sun had staved in the house, falling straight and heavily, point downward, like an unsheathed sword.

I turn my head to the left where there are blots of humidity on the wall outlining a sort of geological collapse, a passage between two strata, in which a lizard is crawling. On my right, on a bedside table, is a still-life composition: two bananas covered with steam on being taken from the ice chest, and a tin of condensed Swiss milk with an Alpine landscape on its label. Each flux of the blood explodes inside the body like air in the cylinder of a motor. I cannot tear myself from the thermometer, and that is very bad. Already the grasshoppers of the quinine are singing in my ears. Will these soft-footed yellow men ever stop

coming into my room! Those naked feet. I never want to see yellow men again. I want to see a good sister of mercy from Lorraine, red-faced, always at hand with an enema. I can feel my liver, blown up and hard as rock, under the lower ribs. The lizard has given up trying to come in. Quinine is no longer the thing; it no longer cures anybody. What we need is those disinfectants that end in *ol* and are a little frightening. The lizard has crawled up on the ceiling above my head. In three hours the shutters will be opened. Then will come noise, and it will be impossible to get to sleep before dawn. The Mohammedan Malays are going to intone the Koran all through the night; at the break of day the Chinese will begin to let off their firecrackers. Why do people in good health seem to think that reclining and sleeping are the same thing?

The Pnom Penh road. A ferry. Two ferries. The Cochin-China polders. Saigon. No, not the clinic. A boat has been specially engaged for me. I am alone on board. From my bed I navigate by electricity. Suez. Marseilles. The boat goes up the side of the Pyrenees. Superbagnères. From there to Chamonix, St. Moritz. Skating, the bob sleighs, the wool, the cows, like those on the condensed milk tin. A firm snow with a crusty surface, under

my tongue. I am going to ring for a great block of ice to be put into my bath.

All this on the first day when you try to shut your fist without being able to do it. Tomorrow will be the second day, the day when you think that if you were to try to pick something up, your fingers would break. . . .

Equatorial Forest

I think of all the French landscape painters who never dared, for centuries, treat nature other than as a decorative background, subordinated to the life of man. And that nature was the Ile de France! Except Henri Rousseau, the one-time customs guard, who put his whole heart into it, what artist would dare face the Tropics?

From ebony to rosewood, here are the living, precious essences that I have hitherto known only in the form of cabinets and Louis XV escritoires, after they have been through heaven knows what Occidental avatars. The sap circulates at incredible pressure, ready to spurt from a cut branch like blood from a cut carotid. The rich, oily, sticky sap oozes forth. In the great forest the gums, varnishes, copals, guttaperchas, resins, lacquers, vegetable sanies, poisonous milky fluids, — all of these weep, run, exude; a sort of viscous mistletoe sticks to the trees. The banyans with their roots like buttresses are the pillars of some cloister broken in the ogives, bending to grow forth again, condemned to eternal re-birth. Each one stands firm against

the precipitous slope, the fall of the mountain-side, clinging to the others by parasitical creepers. The camphor trees, cinnamon trees, trees with fruits as lathery as soaps, are all inhabited by monstrous parasites, by squirting fruits, gourd-shaped plants, mosses with metallic reflections, and weighted with mushrooms whose fungiforms suggest impossible things. Who would dare risk himself in this braided vegetation, woven more closely than any basket? Only from the road do I dare look at these jets of blue and flaring bamboos that grow outward from the centre in fan-shapes daily wider, and these banana trees whose folded leaves are like varnished zinc.

The laughing bird with its orange ears flies past and laughs; there is the rice bird hiding in its bottle-shaped nest; the bats and the flying foxes, now awakened, flutter past my head with a sound of brushed silk or ruffled glove. The ibis, the wading bird, the duck, the pigeon, the curlew; the fishing, talking, whistling, plumbing, soldiering, house-breaking birds paddle and fly and earn their livelihood by hard work in this billionaire's aviary.

The muscles of these thrusting trees that live like hateful neighbors, strangling one another and rotting on end, are hidden under the moss. I stand among them, thrilled by this intestinal fermenta-

tion that is exasperated towards evening by a tepid, greasy water-spout, so heavy that it bores holes wherever it falls. You wait in expectation of a cataclysm, but it never happens. The Tropics are in themselves a silent and permanent cataclysm, and almost, one would say, a punishment for man, if one could imagine man for one moment concerned in this vegetal epos. Here corruption is life, and life dies when its birth has ended. It is easy to understand why India, which has gods enough to go round, heaven knows, nevertheless confided to a single god the governance over procreation and death, destruction and generation. At a point where it is impossible to penetrate any farther into this tepid, steaming forest, one glimpses fruits that look like tumors, maladies that resemble animals, and corpses which, a half hour after their death, have become flowers. Flowers with the odor of urine and of carrion, and, as strange as anything else, European flowers magnified a thousand times, — the begonias of our plateaux, the saxifrage, maidenhair, birthwort, and others. Beneath the creepers that drop like hangmen's ropes or between those that cling to the trunks like sewer pipes, we pick meat-eating orchids. In this necropolis, this floral morgue, the most invisible but the most active destroyers are

the ruddy roaches, the ants, and the leeches that let themselves drop only when they are drunken with blood. Despite this universal revolution, the termites go on building. Furnished with their natural implement, they gnaw, perforate, tap, bury, unearth, in all the hub-bub of a factory.

Here and there, among the trunks that lie dying of their festering phlegmons, their goitres, and their buboes, from whose branches hang like extinguished lanterns the abandoned and translucid skins of pythons, I catch glimpses of pits, tiger traps, camouflaged with underbrush. The tiger, it appears, jumps unsuspectingly with his forefeet on the trunk, and thence, carried forward by his own impetus, into the pit. I see no objection to this manner of defense employed by the natives, but I know nothing more cruel than the acetylene spotlight hunts that are current in Indo-China. The start is made after dinner, with a few bottles of champagne. As soon as two eyes are seen burning in the darkness, the light goes on and the beast is shot down. It would be just as simple to shift into high speed and run down the dazzled tiger or deer. Nor is the "mirador" hunt, with the hunter perched out of reach, any more sporting.

The first time I went into the forest I inquired

about the game birds. "There are mostly peacocks," I was told; and I saw, hanging on the wall of the forest lodge, a dusty, stiff, mummy with a skin like an old glove, — dust on tarnished feathers. Was that a peacock, the symbol of immortality? One morning a tiger was signaled. Fresh claw marks were seen on the ground. The natives were slow to take the trail. The sun was already high when the beast was pointed out to me far over our heads in a ravine. Harrassed by his night work, he slept, took his siesta beatifically stretched on his back with his legs spread wide. His maw was open and his fangs were laughing broadly into the sunlight. His belly was white, and only his back was striped. I am fond of cats. Tigers are but weaker cats, since they are unhappy and tracked. I had no idea of using the Colt, the Winchester, the Browning, and the Gastinne with which I had arrived in the Far East. In the equatorial forest it is man who is the intruder; here more than anywhere else the animals are at home. All I could do was turn back. Let others tell of their "first tiger"; this is the story of my last. I sold all my guns when I got back to the town.

The tropics destroy books in a few years. At Angkor, only the site of the libraries is known;

their contents have disappeared and are represented only by the writings of the sculptors in the sandstone. Are writers going to avenge themselves by destroying the pleasant picture which the West has made for itself of equatorial life?

One of Maupassant's pieces is entitled "In the Good Sunlight"; "In the Evil Sunlight" becomes more and more true as one moves farther south towards the equator. There is the sun, every morning, implacable, knowing no gradations, and ready if you have the slightest fever to pierce your eye and strike at the base of your cranium. This is the celebrated "spotless rising" of the sun, mentioned with admiration in all of Indian mythology. At such times one thinks of the clement light of the North, of the suburban trains that come groping into the city, pouring forth into the mist so many many workmen who dream of the colonies "where life is so painless, so easy." The tropics know no seasons, none of the variety of temperate zones, none of the rhythms of their fruits and those divers climates in which we live in orthodoxy and in the illusion that it is nature which changes while we remain her masters. Here matter bears the imprint of patent immobility, it is a permanent setting of a green more durable than bronze in which the native lives, grows old, and disappears without

ever having laughed. During the first few days one's feeling is of amazement at this equatorial childhood, the royalty of the beasts, the cosmogonical light shed over the festivity, the new aromas. But man is as nothing in this great forest where everything is so dense that he cannot see, so noisy that he cannot hear, where he is merely a powerless parasite, a useless spectator. Nature gets on without him, nothing intervenes in his favor; the domestic animals offer no intercession with their ferocious brothers, science can do nothing about the natural forces, and the creatures enslaved by the earth can do nothing to attenuate its great savagery.

Where is the gaiety of the Western sun that is health, sound, and life? Here we fly the sun, cover ourselves against it, hide from it at noon. Animation reappears only under cover of darkness. Then the men eat, the women work, and the beasts hunt. The great consternation of the day has ended. The sun that filtered through the holes in the verdure as through the skylight of the Roman Pantheon is only a memory; the invincible sun, striking with all its strength, letting itself drop straight down out of the sky, obliterating all masses, truncating all perspectives, devouring all color, has

gone. It creates no shade; grey is its color. And whereas night means movement, noon is mineral immobility, the hour in which the earth has not yet set forth on its round. Brahmin India says of the sun:

"He who gleams is death. Since he is death, this is why the creatures who live below him die. Those who live on the other side of him are the gods. That is why the gods are immortal." And then this sharply modernistic metaphor: "His rays are the reins by which the creatures here below are harnessed to life."

Bokor Palace Hotel

Thanks to a new road which runs from the sea up to a resort four thousand feet high in the mountains, it is possible to take an enchanting trip of two hours. Under a falling light, like that of a movie studio or an aquarium, the forest rises, changing in form and color as one goes up the mountain side, renews its essences, and unrolls from top to bottom like the most astounding of documentary films. From the orchidaceous hothouses up to the shrunken pasture lands we pass foaming cascades, mortal leaves, great arborescent ferns of the early geologic ages like those we see stamped in the hollow of coal mines, lightning-struck trunks, and trees of our own latitudes standing among rocks reminiscent of Barbizon.

Bokor Palace is like a casemate, a prison yard, a school deserted in vacation time even by its ushers, a barracks during manoeuvres, or a casino out of season. It smells of warm, moist wood and of that characteristic odor, — the wet hunting boot drying before the fire. Finished less than a year ago, and representing an energetic Resident

General's conquest over the Cambodian forest and the mountain, this hotel is already on the point of falling into ruin. An example of the immediate and magnificent destruction of the tropics. It brings to mind Cambodian syphilis which is famous among medical men for its rapidity. The evolution of this disease, which in the West sometimes needs a whole life-time for the elaboration of its curve, reaches its last stages here even before there is time to treat the subject. One lives here on a steaming earth and absorbs in a few hours its perfume and its greenish tint of an evil mushroom. On the walls of Bokor the blots of humidity form a series of fantastic processions. The servant boys spring out of nowhere like so many lemurs. A fire — yes, a fire — is built and daubs you with smoke as with a shaving brush. A feverish traveler comes down from his room, urged on by boredom, and shuffles in slippered feet across this hospital parlor. Out of doors is a spraying mist. Guarded by Annamite sharpshooters, prisoners are digging up the garden. You are seized by an irresistible desire to stop living.

Then, towards evening, the clouds part, the seal breaks, a round dormer window opens, crowning an immeasurable landscape. You are so high up that you seem to be looking down through a

screen. The film of clouded languor has gone from everything. At your foot, in the foreground, is the vertiginous four-thousand-feet drop of the forest into the plain. A short plain in which the jungle is caught, squeezed in so tightly that it cannot find its way out of its cane. Compared with this, Armide has only a backyard garden. Then you lift your eyes and the optical cone widens: the whole sea of Cambodia down to the gulf of Siam, a sea ever calm, locked by torn islands, a long, unpolished corridor with no horizon, melting into a metallic background. This is really a region of pewter. Against the black heliotrope of the islands, the very color of those butterflies called crepuscular, rosaries of white flakes are silhouetted, clouds in folds drawn in the style of the country. I turn to the west in time to witness one of those terrible tortures of the equatorial sun, all fire and blood with red pepper in the wounds.

Off Sumatra

After leaving Singapore our ship takes two days to drag itself past the sprawling island of Sumatra sailing gradually closer to the coast line of this great greenish excrescence that lies as if moulded on the giant intestines of a volcano. I admire the distant and gracious sweep of these Malaysian, Philippine, and Indian-Island arks whose backbone was broken by geologic furors. Sumatra is covered with a mildew of dark forests that follow the crest of the mountain range. Here and there its capricious coast is decorated with the golden touch of a strand. With the exception of Siamese pepper, which has been unequalled since the days when the king of Siam sent it as a present to Louis XIV, Sumatra is the land of the most violent and most aromatic spices. The ruddy orang-outangs and the comical macaws make their home here. This is also the last refuge of the two races of men with which man is least familiar (for the Australian bushmen, always cited as the most primitive of men, now live within several days of large cities): the mysterious Orang-Tants, those men

who live on the sea in amphibian regions where the forest grows in the water, in the tepid, slimy mud, and who never come on land; and the Koeboes, who inhabit the greenish obscurity of the inaccessible sylva, perfect neolithic men whom Collet has described with their tracked animal eyes, their bodies twisted with rheumatism, covered with scales like animate, walking roots. Almost nobody has seen this race; it will permit no one to approach and is very chary even of barter. To call these men you have to rap for hours on tree trunks; finally, and only from time to time, like a timid old maid who dares not open her door when the bell has rung but calls out to leave the milk on the landing, they reply to the outer world without showing themselves by depositing in certain places the things they are willing to barter. This is what is called mute swapping.

We reach the north side of the island, the Atjeh country, shaped like an enormous spatulate big toe. Native Mohammedan sultans, quasi-independent, reign over this north country. The Dutch foreign legion (in which Rimbaud once enlisted) strays into this land occasionally and is decimated by invisible warriors perched high in the trees from which they blow poisonous pellets through blow-pipes and kill in silence.

It is here that the electrical tension of the Equator, so violent that it contracts the nerves to the breaking point, reaches its paroxysm. The sparks crackle, there is a continuous and unrelieved discharge of lightning, while the rain that falls is impregnated with nitrogen. There is a pungent smell of ozone as in a radiological laboratory. These regions are wrenched by local tempests and ravaged by tornadoes so sudden that the instruments have not time to register their coming and only the fearful sickle-shaped cloud is there to give warning. One of the "sumatras" struck the *André Lebon*, lying at Singapore and all but sent her down.

This is the end of the Far East. After this evening we shall escape from the strangulation of Malacca. The water is calm. The stripe-bellied tunny-fish leap. The cooler air tells of the sea, the Indian Ocean. We glide beneath a flat cloud of copper and violet, with a curly head. Two waterspouts come out of the cloud and into the sea, two of those tropical deluges to which people look forward evenings as if they were beverages, and which are yet so little refreshing. They form two transparent columns holding up the sky with the white blots of badly exposed plates. Under this spreading canopy we leave the great Asiatic performance.

Ceylon

The greatest and best carved stone in Ceylon is its lighthouse. It is low, placed in the centre of town, and it is hard to guess whether it is there for the sake of the ships or the motor cars. Suddenly there is an end of the warehouses and there, against a background of red earth, is the beginning of the forest. I remember St. John Perse saying to me that the sight of corrugated iron under the cocoanuts went straight to his heart. Here, to stop me in my course, is water borne in five-gallon oil tins hanging from the ends of bamboo poles on the shoulders of long-haired Singhalese, silent and soft as shades, barring my way in their pink sarongs. We make fun of Sarah Bernhardt who, when she reached Central America where she was to play, took a carriage and said: "Coachman, to the virgin forest!" But that is what one does. There is a flood of vegetation which the environs of the city are too frail to contain within bounds. At the slightest sign of the adversary's fatigue it re-conquers its positions, invests the town. You can see banks built on the site of snakes' nests.

Going through the Zoo at Colombo, which has neither the variety of that at Singapore nor the wealth of that at Buizenzorg in Java, but still possesses a modest, Kensingtonian charm, I reach the Museum. It contains a very precious collection of Indian jewelry, collars, bracelets, pendants (the *Asparas* of Angkor are decorated with some like these, for it is possibly to a Singhalese invasion that we owe Angkor), charming old Dutch colonial furniture of the eighteenth century, mahogany and silver, and a unique case filled with ancient devil-dancers' masks of yellow and black lacquer, with red, sightless eyes whose affinity with the grimacing Japanese masks at Nara, the Solomon Island war masks (one in the British Museum looks like General Gallieni), and those of Africa remains to be proved, but surely will be proved one of these days.

Indian Ocean

I recite to myself that poem by Levet that I loved when I was twenty-five:

"The *Armand Béhic*, of the Messageries Maritimes,
traveling at fourteen knots in the Indian Ocean."

Where is the *Armand Béhic?* Wrecked? Blown up? Its poor carcass long since a phantom? And Levet's; where is it?

We are approaching Africa. The sun sinks freely, spreading its rays in the cloudless sky and the hard light. The air is already lighter, easier for our Northern lungs to breathe. Tomorrow we shall see farms, plotted ground, lines: it will be the Mediterranean. Colors without danger. No more of those equatorial sunsets, those daily catastrophes.

Here comes the darkness, less warm and less damp than yesterday's, as if the night itself had ceased to sweat. But there is still an indistinct paste of stars in the sky. And ever the phosphorescent sea. The ship goes forward between two

waters, clots of phosphorus sinking like thrown coins on either side. Behind the propeller the beaten surface is lightly whipped, gleaming like borax. Out of the distance, invisible projectors converge on us.

Sokotra

One night, after five days without sight of land, an island advances towards us, an advance guard of the African continent, greeting us two hours before we see the intermittent light of Cape Guardafui, — the more intermittent for the fact that the Somalis, profiting from any wrecks on their shore, are ever ready to blow out the Italian candle. That island is Sokotra. It comes naturally by its English, for its high chalky cliffs are reminiscent of those of Dover. This is the first sight of land since Colombo. It is here that, with appropriate ceremonial, one buries one's equatorial melancholy. The hard-livered earthy colonials have to bear up only a few more days; once the Red Sea is behind they are at home and safe. So they believe. They lean over the side of the ship and submerge a great spider made of paper. They are drowning their melancholy.

"We'll pick it up again six months from now on the way out," says a colonial administrator.

Aden

Lights and the indulgence of the night lend this sad place, this dismal furnace cracked by the hell fire that nature stokes here the year around, a jubilant air. Our liner relaxed and awaited its supply of oil. After making a thousand sacrifices in order to secure coaling stations in the colonies, now that coal is out of date France is obliged to buy the new fuel in foreign ports. Thus we are visiting the English this evening, the "masters of the ports" as the Malays call them. The anchors have been dropped. Suddenly, out of the invisible, in the darkness, a silent, inconstant, white obliquity meets my gaze. It was suspended in the air, pure of color and free of movement, like an angel's wings. Little by little I saw that boats were coming towards us filled with negroes bearing ostrich plumes. They held a sheaf of feathers in each hand, as if ready to pay loyal homage to the heir to the throne, waving these three plumes of Wales in the still air over the green water that was wakened by our searchlights and showed its swimming jellyfish. The plumes were not very curly, but wide and

so long that they could be worn only on the gown of a revue actress. As soon as one betrayed any interest, the negroes slipped them into tubes of zinc and passed them up towards the ladies on the deck.

Behind us, little black fellows held up their palms, bent back at the wrist, and offered us white coral. All this whiteness shook the night.

Djibouti

We touch the African continent at its best hour, noon. This light is new, dry, pure; in it the eye sees only what exists. Of a sudden I feel the lucid prestige of the Sahara, of Morocco, Sevilla, and in these Abyssinian mountains, the transparence of Atlas. Gone is the perverse pallor of Asia, the dull greens, the dead whites, the soft light that is as if stopped up, spiritless; gone are the nights whose cottoned stars and wadded moon wrapped in its concentric haloes are sickly and wan; gone those dismal dawnings of the beginning of the world. Here is Obok of the beautiful timbres, the inhospitable port deserted for want of water. Djibouti. The white dice of the mosques. A vermillion warehouse rejoicing in existence. Nubians, each a handsome sphinx in a striped turban. Negroes, their hair reddened with lime. Arabs from Yemen, the last importation from supple Asia.

Farewell to mosquitoes and hail to flies, those queens of dry lands. Houses of laundry blue. Is this Tunis, Marrakesh, or Girgenti?

I spent the evening in the hut of a negress, a gift made to me. My companion was six feet seven inches in height. Her skin was of glazed crepe with coral incrustations for nails. Her torso was long, and curved so far that when she lay down one could peer under her and see the back wall. As a Baudelarian tourist, I examined her immense belly, decorated with tattoo marks that rose in relief on the skin, like the books for the blind. I made the round of her legs. Cool and indifferent, she allowed herself to be visited as if she had been a grotto. An impetuous person, and, all in all, a beautiful specimen of gigantomachia.

When I finally touched earth (without thereby recovering my strength), she said, pointing to my Chinese pongee:

"You all silk. You not soldier. You money."

Despite this it was cheap, even by the yard. Such monuments are all to the honor of our colonies. She offered to accompany me to Paris for three thousand francs. Would the President of the Republic have accepted my gift?

Indian Mail

Seated in my armchair here in Paris I shall soon think of all the ships that are at sea. Some are asleep and are making their twelve or thirteen knots in calm water. In their bellies, I see diners in evening clothes and black and red jazz sounding like a negro hunt. Below are the engines; above is the bridge, duty, silence. In the absolute darkness is one luminous point, the compass, lighting up feebly a mariner's face. Then my eyes grow clearer and I see a white phantom, the officer of the watch, motionless, his head raised to the Southern Cross. My thought flies to other, more distant ships: it is daybreak; the decks are being washed down and I hear the sound of rushing water and of brooms. Again, distance increasing with the hour, — for to travel is to live by the stars, — I see the Chinese boys polishing the brass and the first drinkers coming in their pyjamas into the bar still filled with ash and with the stench of the previous evening's cigars, dirtied with poker chips sown like broken teeth after a fight. There are the five hundred-ton ships on

which one is alone with a pipe and the ship's cat; there are those of fifty thousand tons whose painted and varnished decks are as fresh as a fashionable beach before luncheon. The women are exquisite, — or would seem so if here, as elsewhere, they knew how to fly in the midst of regrets. But they remain, and what is beauty when contemplated without privation for thirty days? There are the siestas during the heat waves when you lie with your head in the air shaft until the gong sounds for tea. There is the night on the bridge when the air in the cabin is stifling, your sleep broken by wakings when other ships are met and have turned out of their path to sniff at yours. Those of the same company salute one another, the night takes to its hot-water bottle, the radio operators shorten their waves to four hundred yards and whisper in the darkness news of home.

And doubtless there are also the great mail steamers caught in a storm, nose low in the waves, pushing forward their charge, groaning in the complete darkness, advancing painfully in the sweeping rain, writhing in the wind with the poop alternately in the sky and at the bottom of the abyss. Below deck, the hairdresser's perfume bottles are breaking and men are hanging between life and death in the belly of a great Leviathan

redolent of *chypre*. At such a moment if, instead of being in one's armchair in Paris and thinking of ships, one is on a coffin-bunk, floating instead of motionless, one thinks of one's study off in the antipodes, in France, of how good the solid earth is with its horizontal books, papers no longer flying in the wind, windows never blown open, ink that does not spill, matches that strike and are not wet, — and one misses life on land. For two or three days one has gone down to the dining saloon on all fours. All the furniture is clamped into place; the lift goes up on a bias; the wave comes up, spits, and slaps the porthole, lengthening a second into a night; in a corner of the cabin the wardrobe trunk dances like a bear; the children play at shipwreck. Then one decides to imitate them and says to oneself that no life is as good as death now, on the high seas, at the zenith.

To those who say that beauty is disappearing one can answer instantly: "And what about liners?" A liner does not imply the romanticism of the sailing vessel; it represents a great return to classic lines, to the line of temples and of the most exacting architecture. Its flanks like cliffs, its new flattened smokestacks, its high superstructures; the winches and capstan cranes forward and aft

like the white columns of Greece; the decks like superposed cloisters; the vertiginous flight of parallel lines on the promenades; the rubber-lined half-decks; the vistas from end to end of drawing-rooms and dining saloons with no columns to support their ceilings; the depth of the swimming pools; the play of electric lights, searchlights, that suddenly light up a ship as for a festivity on entry into a port, revealing in the darkness the ship's purest lines and amazing the port; — all these are so many reflections of our epoch. The theorists of the new architecture have continual recourse to ships for their inspiration. We owe to the Germans this conception of the monster liner with its power, its speed, and its capacity for smooth navigation in the midst of storms. This nation devoid, except for its Hanseatic towns, of a maritime past, has carried out with a tranquil and audacious technique what none other dared to do.

A liner is much less cosmopolitan than a hotel. True, it transports all races, but it keeps intact its national characteristics and atmosphere. Hotels are open to all, receive everybody, are always ready for profit. The liner works for its country in order to fly its country's flag. What navigation company has grown rich? As soon as you cross

the gangplank the face of the captain, the carriage of the crew, the odor of the kitchen, and an indescribable air of the country greet you as unmistakably as if you had crossed a frontier. The American ship is strong, gay, and vulgar. You hear the jazz band twenty hours out of twenty-four. You come on and go off at ports in noise and confetti. Fifteen minutes after arrival you can telephone from your cabin to the town. The English ship is well regulated, distinguished, the service excellent, the crew a model crew, the games varied, the food horrible; you dress in the evening; on the surface your conduct is strictly reserved, and on Sundays everybody attends divine service. The German and Dutch ships are polished like fine furniture; the meals are too heavy and too frequent; the passengers are deadly dull. The French ship is the image of our political Eden: a meridional scheme got up by the pals and upset by a lot of filthy paying passengers. The crews belong to trades unions and are not afraid of the competition of the yellow men who render such marvelous and noiseless service on the foreign liners. Therefore in bad weather you may ring and ring while you wait for a Latin brother to bring you a cup of bouillon. Untidiness reigns supreme. You may come down to lunch in your

night-shirt and your wife in her dressing jacket. The crew are dressed like pirates. It is a matter of principle that whatever you may ask for is "not allowed" or "impossible." No going ashore at ports of call because that is expensive; no change of bed linen; no cinema, and no music. But the cellar is excellent, and few people are bored at night in their cabins. Economy, our national flag, flies in the wind. For example: the *d'Artagnan*, the most recent of the Messageries liners, a handsome ship of 18,000 tons, has no hot water in the cabins, no pool, no diesel launch to take passengers ashore (which would have cost fifty thousand francs, whereas twenty times as much was spent for astounding decorative paintings representing the three musketeers). As a result, when you have been rowed ashore by a local boatman, you find that the passengers off the other liners have beaten you in and taken all the rooms in the hotel, — and you sleep in the smoking room.

The optical illusion created by travel, the mirage of space (which, less fortunate than the mirage of time, still awaits its Proust), is a curious thing. Scarcely had I reached home when I forgot the immense boredom of sea travel and began to miss the Asian liners, the travelers in ducks, in

Chinese trousers, in Malay sarongs, the Annamite nursemaids, the orderly-servants of the Residences, the health service pennants, that jaundice, the furnace of the machinery, the rattle of the radio calls, the three sounds of the water — tearing forward, beating aft, and hissing on either side — the charged water under the stem and those great soapy marbled patterns, like Javanese batiks, on the surface of the sea. And the calls in port so expectantly awaited minute by minute, and so fatiguing, so disappointing as soon as one lands among the long rows of warehouses and becomes the butt of the customs guards, the sharpers, and the venders of trumpery goods. One's only thought then is to get back on board; and two hours later one is stretched happily in an armchair in the cabin, listening to the rich accent of the Marsellaise Captain shouting from his bridge: " . . . and if anybody bothers me I'll put him in irons!"

Asiatic Hotels

The great modern hotel, known in French as *palace* (a word which, like the French *smoking*, *dancing*, *footing* and other Continental substantives, is unknown in English) dates from the end of the nineteenth century. It is not the descendant of our ancient inns; it is precisely a caravenserai, which is to say the place in the Orient where the caravans, with their goods, their merchants, their donkey relays, their barterers, and their middlemen stop, the annexe of the bazaar that one reads about in Gobineau, in the *Thousand Nights and A Night*, or in the Indian storytellers. We were on the point of becoming acquainted with such hotels shortly after the Crusades, but they came no farther into Europe than the isle of Rhodes, where they may still be seen. The Jews, who were so useful a bond between the two continents, so long as we were too lazy to create any ourselves, brought them in from the East. Did not Jehovah say to Israel: "Thou shalt inhabit houses which thou hast not built"? It must be true that despite everything — and in particular despite the servant

crisis — Paris has more personality than we realize, for our great hotels have never succeeded in becoming the centre of social life and the arbiters of fashion they are in London and New York. Rome affords a curious example of a city whose social life, even before the war, was obliterated by its hotels. We see them grafted on to the life of Paris but not participating in it. The great hotel marks a step beyond the tent; but does it indicate any progress over the middle-class apartment, that last and frail envelope of the family cell?

In the Far East the hotel is king. We render unto Asia that which we received from it. There, the Chinese makes the European his guest, or, leaving his wife to reign over the home, there he and his friends assemble for their debauchery. There, too, the Japanese give honorable dinners to the honorable White dogs who might otherwise force an entry into their homes and soil their mats with shoes brought in from the street. The Spaniard is in this and many other traits an Oriental and the heir to the Arabs, never opening his door to us; he receives at the hotel on a special day which he calls "*de moda*." The hotel is a terrain of armistice, a shock-absorbing edifice. International conferences like it and share its characteristic architec-

ture and duration. The Swiss, a neutral nation, best know how to manage hotels.

With the exception of a Japanese hotel at Kyoto and an American hotel at Manila, the hotels of Asia are expensive and bad. The English hotels at Singapore and Hong Kong were built in the period of "English comfort," a mediocre Victorian ideal which has long since been out-distanced by the Americans, the Germans, and the French. You stop in these hotels either on the "American plan," which is to say *en pension*, or on the "European plan," paying only for your room. The rooms are dirty, and badly ventilated, toilets are undiscoverable, and in the bathrooms there is only a pitcher and a pot for one's ablutions. Including meals, you pay something like five hundred francs a day, and the food is not to be eaten. Evenings, the English dress in order to pour bottled sauces (whose utility one thus discovers) over rotten food which they swallow without a murmur. The English hotels in India are as bad as these I have just mentioned. The international hotels at Pekin, which are built at the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway, have felt the effect of the slowing up of traffic and the absence of tourists, — for the Japanese earthquakes and the Chinese wars have frightened the tourist away from Asia,

tourists constituting a race as easily frightened as wild ducks. The Shanghai hotels are chiefly restaurants, bars . . . and so on. Sarabands and jazz bands cover their gay roofs. They are jovial and sumptuous, — and by sumptuous I mean meringued, the casino style. The only Whites who have not dishonored architecture in Asia are — or were — the Germans at Tsing-Tao and the Americans at Manila. The hotel at Manila is an example of the most rational utilization of a tropical house: bare rooms, stone bathtubs, floors of polished teak, walls with latticed, open-air freizes. As for the hotels of Indo-China and in particular Saigon, it is best not to speak of them, although the Governors have encouraged the building of bungalows for guests, which afford some relief. There is nothing here comparable to the Transatlantic hotels in French North Africa, so modern, so comfortable, so cheap, and so happily and discreetly adapted to local styles of architecture.

Suez

We have spent the whole night passing noiselessly between the hoops of lighted buoys through the canal lit up by our searchlights. Bitter Little Lake. Bitter Big Lake. We awake in the morning amid wild shifting sands bordered by salt marshes, in a desert that has been persuaded to grow orange trees, alfalfa, and malt grains. From Port Tewfik, the outskirts of ancient Suez, to Port Said we go over the greatest short-cut in the world, cut through by sweat, created by epidemics, failures, loans, unmuzzled cannon, and eternally beaten by propellers. I think of the old magazines I looked through in my childhood: pictures of the formal opening of the Canal, a medley of Biblical scenes and Offenback stage-sets; the Mass celebrated by the chaplain of the Tuileries surrounded by dervishes; the dust of Arab games; the "high life" of Ismailia; Clemenceau in the speakers' tribune; the Grand Mufti; Lord Salisbury in a grey top hat; the Empress on camel back or at the Palace of Gezirah in a blue satin mosquito veil; not to speak of him who broke this membrane

between two continents, M. de Lesseps, already an Oriental, with faith only in astrologers and the signs in the heavens, superstitious and a poet like all great men of affairs, asking the Khedive for the *firman* of the concession only on the day when the rainbow appeared to him as a sign of the alliance of East and West.

Here ends Asia; here ends the Asiatic pest strangled in the lazarettoes; here war is interrupted over a space of a few neutralized miles. Flattened between sky and sand this rut made by a single wheel — the Wheel of Fortune — is this truly the Route of the Indies that my textbooks of diplomatic history mention, and that I read about in leaders on foreign politics? Leading its dismal parallel lines to the horizon that rises like a balustrade, this seems rather like the Grand Canal at Versailles, the green carpet of Schoenbrunn, the ornament of a royal domain whose sovereigns, greater than the Pharoahs, are the owners of the Standard Oil and Asiatic Petroleum tanks wreathed round by laurels and flamingo roses.

Port Said

Men of prey, roughly peeled, stand in this dry, bare air of Egypt. They choke the entry to this corridor, the first to welcome and to strip the caravans. Parsee, Greek, Italian, and Maltese merchants. The Jews among them look so dry that they must have crossed and re-crossed the Red Sea in Biblical fashion. All of them sell to outgoing travelers those tropical outfits so horribly made up by the Army and Navy Stores; returning travelers are expected to be tempted for the last time by Turkish slippers. This is the land of the profiteer, that animal-headed deity that grows on footways, overflowing with merchandise to the very ground. He who has once seen the untidiness of an Oriental shop, trespassing out on to the street, will always recognize it. It is to be found in Commercial Road in London, and behind the rue de Rivoli in Paris, in those old quarters about the Hotel de Ville which date from the fifteenth century, and also in the post-war East that runs between the place de la Bastille and Menilmontant.

For the first time in four months I see nobody who is naked. Civilization is beginning. Henceforward the supple lines of the body are corrected by the geometry of the ready-to-wear and enveloped like things diseased in cloths.

Crete

This morning we pass in sight of, — or to speak nautically, we are "off" — the coast of Crete, a strayed bit of Greece. Each time that I have been in the Aegean Sea I have wished to stop at Crete, to sharpen the edge of this long, much-nicked sacrificial knife that lies in deep water at the crossroads of all the Mediterranean routes.

Exactly in the middle, like a pivot, stands Mt. Ida with its snows that no lightning can melt and its chalky rock that gives one the illusion of more snow. Hitherto I had seen only the welcoming coast that Crete turns to the north between the Sea of Minos and the Aegean; I was ignorant of this hard, primitive, harsh line that looks towards Africa.

Straits of Messina

When I saw the coast of Calabria I knew that the earth was round. There is no doubt about it: here it was that I passed one morning in August 1922, a morning unforgetable among so many others less beautiful and forgotten; and here, below Taormina, in 1923, I tried to break a floating bottle by shooting at it with a Browning; and it is this same coast, cut with volcanic notches, that I see this evening and that is Europe. Selfish, envious, democratic and dispersed Europe, like all old peninsulas; curious and tiny spectacle seen from the outside at this moment when the earth belongs more and more to the massive continents, to Africa, Chinese Asia, and North America the club-shaped, the tomahawk. Europe dismantled by those modern explosives: the desire for money and the spirit of revolt. Europe become so ugly, but still our mother. Europe so refined and ladylike, its coastlines curled with a curling-iron, its rivers like so many wrinkles, its coquettish twilight, its shallow waters, its domesticated mountains, its islands so exquisitely exempt, and its fields fertilized and fattened with the dead.

What haven't I heard in the course of this voyage about the end of the white man's privileges, the decrepitude of Europe! But Europe, to begin with, is not all white race. And then, is Europe really so old? Is it not possible that this taste for speed, this appetite for material things, this excessive production with which it is reproached, are all indications of growing pains? Should we not see in them rather ferments than poisons? Look at provincial little Italy, only yesterday the old-fashioned prey of Latin anarchy. Four years have sufficed for its rebirth, its transformation into a cohesive modern State, preferring actions to words, propping up its credit, establishing itself in the Levant and the Ponent, and soon on the way to doubling its population. These desperate recrudescences, this frenzied struggle against chaos, these Aryan reactions of the germ plasm, this worship of heroic individuals, — is not all this Europe? Here are Messina and Reggio in Calabria re-built. We are entering a world of certainty. I can hear Paul Valéry say: "The Greeks and the Romans have shown us how one operates with the Monsters of Asia. . . ."

Behind me I leave the countries that are crumbling and know not how to re-build.

First French Lighthouse

This evening after tea the night of the North has fallen: the stars gleam. The air is clear and cold; no longer can I feel any doubt about the truth or any contempt for the utilitarian. Soon I shall reach my homeland and experience its stern welcome. The tour of the world is not a French exercise: thirteen times the globe had been circled by the great nations of Europe before a single French made the venture. We had to wait until 1714 when a smuggler named La Barbinais le Gentil, urged on by a national propensity to defraud the Treasury, took the risk. Very reluctantly, he made the tour of the globe. His frigate was named *la Boudeuse*, the Sulky Maid.

From the bridge they have sighted the Portcros Lighthouse, the first on French territory. Shortly after, two others appear simultaneously: St. Mandrier, hiding Toulon and its green flame in the emerald bay that all sailors admire, and Cassis. The lights are seen through the steaming portholes of the saloon. I think of the frenzy of the Americans when suddenly their New York rises out of the

sea. Theirs is the hard-won homeland, the new homeland with its thousand nourishing breasts, the transparent future, the handsome children, strength, easy money, hope. Hats fly, the orchestra rages, the old people dance like mad. Everybody commingles, talks excitedly to everybody else. Here, on this November evening, on this dismal, chill ship, weary and shivering colonials are going home in the company of modest prostitutes perfumed with bad luck, irritable and under-paid civil servants, restless family men the enemies of risk, people who have seen their fortune shrunk by one half since they left France, bitter-tongued opium smokers. They are mute; they turn their backs. After a month of lively friendships and excessive volubility, they all hate one another.

Have we become the most acrid sons of this European race that the tiger dislikes because of its acidulous flesh?

THE END